













A HISTORY OF THE GREAT WAR  
IN FOUR VOLUMES  
VOLUME IV











*Admiral William Sowden Sims*





# A HISTORY OF THE GREAT WAR

BY  
JOHN BUCHAN

VOLUME IV



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# A HISTORY OF THE GREAT WAR.

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## CHAPTER LXXXIII

### GERMANY RESHUFFLES HER CARDS

*October 27, 1916–October 31, 1917*

The Situation in Austria—The Koerber Ministry—The Clam-Martinitz Ministry—Count Czernin—The Stockholm Conference—The Popular Movement in Germany—The Fall of Bethmann-Hollweg—Michaelis Imperial Chancellor—The Reichstag Resolution of 1914—The Vatican Note—Kuhlmann's Policy—Fall of Michaelis—Count Hertling appointed Chancellor.

THE student who sought to follow German policy during the war was not embarrassed with too much material. The nation was so well disciplined that it was hard to tell when a speech or a press article represented a genuine opinion, or was only a move in a diplomatic game. The Main Committee of the Reichstag, where the more important discussions took place, sat in secret session, and reports of its doings leaked out only by accident. Hence the sequence of German politics had to be judged mainly by events which were apparent to all the world—the fall of a minister, an official pronouncement, and machinations in neutral countries where disclosure soon or late was certain. Yet, in spite of the mist, the outlines were unmistakable. Events beyond her eastern frontier had forced upon Germany a new orientation of policy, if she was to keep her own people in hand and pluck the fruits which the fates had generously offered. We have already seen her efforts in Russia itself to promote the anarchic elements

in the revolution. But it was also her business to take advantage of the new wave of Jacobinism in order to embarrass the Allies by emphasizing those elements in their government and purpose which were least Jacobinical. Like Mithridates in Asia Minor, on behalf of her own satrapy she was ready to preach the "social revolution." It was a delicate game, for she had no desire to rouse among her own tame people the furies she would fain release elsewhere. It is the purpose of this chapter to consider Germany in the rôle of virtuous democrat, the junker masquerading in the cap of liberty.

The situation in Austria would have forced her to this policy, even had there been no other reason, for Austria was nervous, profoundly depressed, and feverishly anxious to explore any alley that might lead to peace. Of all the members of the Teutonic League, except Turkey, she had suffered most. Her armies had been time and again defeated, and she had been compelled to take the first shock of each Russian offensive. Such pride as she possessed had been cut to the quick by her Prussian taskmasters, and she had seen her best troops and her chief generals moved about the map without her assent. Further, the economic strain was growing desperate. Every corner of the land was hungry, and her Government made no effort to distribute food stocks with anything like justice among the different classes. It looked as if Austria might drop out of the war from sheer exhaustion, and this was a possibility which Germany dare not contemplate, for without Austria the *Mitteleuropa* ideal was impossible, and *Mitteleuropa*, in some form or other, was at the root of German policy. Austria-Hungary was essential to the Berlin-Bagdad scheme — that *Drang nach Osten*, undertaken in order to consolidate the fatherland and to provide a continuous block of territory, economically self-sufficient and strategically invulnerable, to counterbalance the sea-united British Empire. The longer the war lasted the clearer it became that this extension to the south-east was the one thing Germany could not forego and remain the Germany of the Hohenzollerns. Long before 1914 she had stretched her tentacles beyond the Balkans, over Anatolia, northern Syria, and Mesopotamia. By November 1916 she had conquered Poland, Serbia, and the better part of Wallachia, and with Bulgaria and Turkey as her satellites the *bloc* was complete. She did not content herself with the military occupation of these territories. The guns were scarcely silent before she had begun their political and economic reorganization with a view to the *Mitteleuropa* hegemony. Should Austria fail her the pin would

drop out of the whole machine, and Germany had no intention of permitting such defection.

In the nature of things Austria could not be a very docile or willing ally. Only the Germans and Magyars among her people accepted the Prussian policy, and it is likely that the land would not have shown a majority in favour of war. The Poles hated the Germans, though a considerable number, owing to their suspicion of Russia, accepted the lead of Vienna. The same was true of the Ruthenes in eastern Galicia. Her other races, the Czechs and the Slovaks, the Croats and the Slovenes, the Rumanians and the Italians, were hostile or indifferent to the Central Powers. Partly they were irredentists, like the last two, looking for succour from their nationals across the borders; partly they were self-subsistent nationalities — the Northern Slav group of Czechs and Slovaks with Polish and Ruthene allies, and the Southern Slav group of Slovenes, Croats, and Serbs — whose ideal was racial unity. Even in Austria itself there were rifts within the lute. The Court officials, the bureaucracy, and the hierarchy were on Germany's side. So were the German bourgeoisie; so were the rich financial houses, largely controlled by Jews. The piquant spectacle was presented of the Christian Socialist party, clerical and anti-Semitic, joining hands with the National Union of Liberals, Semitic and anti-clerical, in the honourable task of working "*pour le Roi de Prusse*." But certain powerful elements were jealous of German interference. The ancient nobility had no intention of playing the part of puppets pulled from Berlin, and loved the German as little as the Slav. The Army, the chief unifying force in the Empire, speedily lost its admiration for its efficient ally. By the autumn of 1916 the great Austrian families and the whole corps of officers were in the mood to take offence at any hint of German dictation. The Dual Monarchy was consequently no easy problem for Germany to handle. The non-German races, with the exception of the Magyars, were avowedly hostile, and they formed the bulk of the population; while the Austrian magnates cast jealous eyes on every proposal from Berlin, and were resolved to assert the interests of their caste against an ally who treated the whole earth as material out of which to make real her grandiose dream.

On October 27, 1916, after the murder of the Austrian premier, Count Sturgkh, Dr. Ernst von Koerber was entrusted with the formation of a new Cabinet. The Austrian Parliament, unlike the Hungarian Parliament, had never been in session during the war; it had been prorogued in March 1914, and had remained suspended.

No public meeting had been allowed, the censorship was rigid, and Sturgkh's career, till the assassin's bullet cut it short, was peace itself compared with that of other belligerent statesmen. Koerber was an honest and fairly liberal bureaucrat, strongly pro-Austrian, and not disposed to listen readily to Pan-German extremism. His task was threefold — to agree with Germany on the future of Poland, to carry a new *Ausgleich* with Hungary, and to strengthen the non-Slav elements in the Austrian Parliament by the grant of a larger autonomy to Galicia. All three tasks raised the question of relations with Germany. Austria had accepted unwillingly the German scheme as to Poland, which was given effect to by the proclamation of November 5, 1916; but she hoped by her plan of Galician autonomy so to embarrass the German settlement as to revive the Austrian solution which Berlin had rejected. As to the new *Ausgleich* with Hungary, it had been proposed to make it run for twenty years, so as to make easy the economic *rapprochement* with Germany on which the *Mitteuropa* scheme depended. It was clear that Koerber was inclined to prove refractory to German guidance on all points, and the pro-German faction in Austria took alarm. The Premier was bombarded with protests and memoranda from the National Union, the Christian Socialists, and the other satellites of Berlin. He proposed to submit the new *Ausgleich* to Parliament, and to this for obvious reasons both the Austro-Germans and the Magyars were opposed. Its advantages to Hungary were too apparent, its severe burden in the shape of food taxation upon the Austrian people too glaring. On 13th December he found himself compelled to resign.

Koerber's fall seemed like the triumph of Berlin and Budapest over Vienna. Dr. Spitzmüller was entrusted with the formation of a fresh Ministry, whose immediate business was to carry the new *Ausgleich*. But Spitzmüller found it impossible to proceed without summoning Parliament, and such a step would raise other controversial matters which he wished to keep slumbering. By 20th December he had failed to make any headway, and a Bohemian noble, Count Clam-Martinitz, was called to the task. At first sight this appeared to mark the dawn of a different policy. The young Emperor seemed to be about to surround himself with the advisers of his uncle, the Archduke Francis-Ferdinand. Baron Burian, the faithful disciple of Tisza, who had succeeded Count Berchtold in January 1915 as Foreign Minister, was replaced by a Czech, Count Ottokar Czernin, who had been noted in the past for his anti-Magyar leanings. The Premier himself was a Czech, though



of the Germanized variety, and on the whole the new Ministry had a federalist complexion. The more reactionary of the Court officials and permanent civil servants disappeared; and Count Berchtold, who had always been at odds with Tisza, became Court Chamberlain. It looked as if the Emperor Charles intended to make a stand against the tyranny alike of Berlin and Budapest.

But the appearance was illusory. The Bohemian members were at heart German centralists, and had nothing in common with the true Czech nationalists, such as Kramarz and Masaryk. Clam-Martinitz's programme was substantially the same as his predecessor's. For the first three months of 1917 he attempted, by secret cabals and open negotiations, to effect a compromise between the conflicting interests, but found the task too hard. The demands of German nationalists, Austrian bureaucrats and courtiers, and Polish patriots proved incompatible. Suddenly upon this maze of intrigue and counter-intrigue fell like a thunderbolt the news of the Russian Revolution, and the situation was at once transformed. If Russia was to be preoccupied with her internal affairs so that her military effort languished, there was a chance of Austria coming to terms with her. But if an understanding was to be reached, it was essential that Austrian policy should wear a democratic air, and above all that she should appear to be liberal towards the Slav nationalities. It was a supreme chance for the restless genius of Count Czernin, and on 14th April an offer, inspired by him, was made by Vienna to Petrograd.

But when the Austrian Parliament met on 30th May Clam-Martinitz found his position impossible. The negotiations with Russia had not proceeded smoothly. Whatever attitude the new Government in Petrograd might adopt to the war aims of the Allies, it had very little to say to the overtures from Vienna. The Poles had become intractable, encouraged by Russia's proclamation of a complete and independent Poland. On the first day of the session the Czechs and the Southern Slavs demanded national union, and they would not be put off with the old answer. On 16th June the Polish group resolved to vote against the Budget, and this decision compelled Clam-Martinitz to resign. On 24th June Dr. Seidler formed a stop-gap Ministry of obedient civil servants.

Meantime in Hungary one remarkable event had happened. In the last week of May Count Tisza fell from power. Up to the date of his fall he seemed to be more secure in office than any of his predecessors. He had negotiated the still unconfirmed *Ausgleich*,

which represented an uncommonly good bargain for Hungary as against Austria. He was the close ally of Berlin, as befitted one who was responsible for the war. The Magyars and the Prussians had natural affinities which Count Julius Andrassy was never tired of pointing out, and though Tisza had no enthusiasm for *Mittel-europa*, he had less for the ideals of the Allies. His following in Parliament was strong, for the opposition was never more than a bogus thing, to be used as a means of blackmailing the Emperor. He held a singular position for a man of his antecedents. A member of the ancient untitled Hungarian gentry (the title of Count, the badge of the Austrian connection, was inherited from his uncle, and was not twenty-four years old), he was by far the strongest man in the whole Dual Monarchy. A staunch Calvinist, he dictated to Austria, one of the most Catholic countries in Europe. His power came from his narrowness, his courage, and his contempt for opponents. He laughed alike at those who made speeches against him and those who tried to murder him. He bullied and baited all who threatened him, from the Emperor down to the petty aristocrats of the opposition. He scorned tact and conciliation as the weapons of weaklings. His own instrument was the hammer, and he brought it down hard on the heads of all who stood in his way. Such a figure must rouse fierce antagonisms, and Tisza fell because he had made too many foes. His rivals in Parliament joined forces with the Emperor, and the combination was too much for him. But there was never any question of a change of policy. The three Counts — Andrassy, Apponyi, and Karolyi — were all sworn to Germany's cause abroad and staunch for Magyar domination at home, though the last had a few progressive phrases which deceived casual observers in Western Europe. It was a change of personalities, not of principles. The new Premier, Count Maurice Esterhazy, was a typical young Hungarian nobleman, who had been educated at Oxford, and ten years earlier would have been a declared Anglophil. He had been a brother officer of the Emperor, and had an urbanity and tolerance which had been lacking in his masterful predecessor. But Tisza, though out of office, remained in power, and the bonds which Germany had riveted were in no way loosened.

Nevertheless the unpopularity of Tisza and the desperate confusion of Austrian politics gave the Austrian Foreign Minister the chance for which he had been waiting. His aim was to be the peacemaker of Europe, for in a speedy peace he saw the only chance for the perpetuation of the Dual Monarchy. Already the omens

were alarming. The downfall of Tsarist Russia brought the break-up of Austria-Hungary nearer, for it removed Italy's chief fears about the political orientation of any future Southern Slav state, and this new fact in the situation was soon to be recognized in the Pact of Corfu, signed on 20th July by M. Pashitch, the Serbian Prime Minister, and Dr. Trumbitch, the President of the Southern Slav Committee. Czernin believed that the overtures must come from Berlin, and that Berlin must begin by democratizing its household. The submarine campaign was not succeeding as fast as Germany had hoped, and on this fact he built his chief hopes of success. On 12th April he presented a memorandum on the subject to the Emperor Charles, which was duly communicated to the Emperor William and his Chancellor. Then Czernin set himself to work on the Reichstag, and found a colleague and an instrument in Herr Erzberger, an emotional *frondeur*, who had been Germany's ablest foreign propagandist and was now a busy go-between in the cause of peace.

If Germany's policy was affected on one side by Austria, a second source of influence was a movement suddenly appearing in certain neutral states. We have seen that early in April the *Internationale*\* woke into activity, a body which, having been founded to promote universal harmony and peace, had exhibited to the world a marvellous spectacle of internal warfare. Transferred from Brussels to the Hague after the outbreak of war, it had been a means for the self-advertisement of the Dutch Germanophil, Troelstra, and the Belgian Huysmans, who was not recognized by his countrymen. It issued invitations for a Socialist Conference at Stockholm, and a Dutch Scandinavian Committee was formed under the presidency of Branting, the leader of the Swedish Socialists, and the most generally respected figure in his party in Europe since the death of Jaurès. His sympathies were strongly on the Allied side, and, though he was not responsible for the original invitations, he set to work to make the affair a practical success. During May the delegations began to arrive, and were received in audience by the Standing Committee. The Conference had suddenly assumed a new importance, owing to the insistence upon it by the leaders of the Russian Revolution as the first step towards the clarifying of the issues of the war. Austrian, Hungarian, and Bulgarian delegations came, and a curious group of Bohemians who were entirely repudiated by the Czech Socialist party. These deputies from enemy countries were to all intents

\* This was the Second International, which dated from 1889.



and purposes emissaries of their Governments with a mission to propose schemes which would do the utmost damage to the Allies and the least to the Central Powers. Early in June came the delegation of the German Majority Socialists, which included — besides Scheidemann, the Majority leader — that Hermann Müller who, on the eve of the declaration of war, had invited the French Socialists to vote against war credits. The programme which they circulated announced that Germany had fought only a defensive war; that the Allies, and especially Britain, were the aggressors; and that imperialism was the cause of all the trouble — imperialism of the Allied and not of the Teutonic brand.

Meantime the Conference was being hotly discussed outside Scandinavia. The French Socialist party began by refusing the invitation, and British Labour stuck to the resolution of the Manchester Congress that there could be no relation with enemy socialists so long as the invaded countries were not evacuated. But the Russian situation began to raise difficulties. The soviets continued to press for a conference, and to repeat their formula, "No annexations or indemnities," without any attempt at a further definition. It was obvious that the attitude of these leading practitioners of applied socialism must weaken the original steadiness of the Allied refusal. The French delegates, MM. Moutet and Cachin, returned from Russia at the end of May, and secured a vote of the French National Council in favour of going to Stockholm — not, indeed, to sit with enemy delegates, but to have a separate meeting with the Standing Committee. On 1st June M. Ribot announced that his Government would refuse to grant passports for any such purpose. In Britain the situation was slightly different. No labour congress acknowledged the Conference, though the pacifist minority, the Independent Labour Party, would fain have attended. This the Government refused to permit; but on 8th June Lord Robert Cecil declared that passports would be granted to the delegates whom the Russian soviets had invited to Petrograd, on the understanding that the holders did not take part in any international conference at Stockholm, or communicate directly or indirectly with enemy subjects. The concession was idle, for the British Seamen's and Firemen's Union, full of bitterness at German submarine atrocities, refused to allow the delegates to leave British shores.

The proceedings at Stockholm during June were not calculated to induce more harmony in the reborn *Internationale*. It was found impossible to agree upon any formula, and the German

delegates issued a programme which revealed most brazenly the farce of their whole position. They put in the forefront no annexations and no indemnities, and interpreted the latter phrase as excluding restitution for the ravages of war. They were willing to safeguard the independence of the states which had lost it during the war, such as Belgium and Serbia, and of the states which had regained it during the war, such as Russian Poland and Finland; and they insisted upon independence for those peoples still in slavery — namely, Ireland, India, and the dependencies generally of Britain, France, Italy, and Japan. They declined to regard Alsace-Lorraine as a special nationality, and they made no reference to the subject peoples of Austria, Germany, and Turkey. Their programme was not far removed from Bethmann-Hollweg's appeal to the war map, the old doctrine of *beati possidentes*. Whatever Stockholm failed to do, it made the position of the Scheidemann party abundantly clear. They had come as Government emissaries, and they departed after completing their mission, precisely like diplomats who had fulfilled their instructions.

So far there had only been preliminary meetings, at which France, Britain, Italy, and America had not appeared. The Standing Committee proposed a plenary conference for August, at which Russia should be represented, and four missionaries of the soviets toured Western Europe to prepare the ground. It was at once apparent to those who made their acquaintance that the four drew no distinction between enemy and Allied socialists; that they were not interested in the question of the responsibility for war; that they did not think in terms of nationalities at all; and that their sole object was to prepare an international machinery for the class war which was their serious ideal. Presently it appeared that Western socialists were hopelessly divided upon these and kindred questions. A large number refused to meet representatives of enemy countries while the war lasted. Of those who were in favour of going to Stockholm, some wished only a consultative conference, while others wished its resolutions to be binding; some sought to have the question of the responsibility for the war put in the forefront; some wished to meet enemy delegates only to indict them; some were willing to postpone the indictment to the end, provided that the Conference decided on the question of guilt before it rose. On the matter of policy, one section believed that if the Conference once sat the Germans would entangle it in barren discussions and split the Allied unity; another section considered that any conference would lead to the



revelation and condemnation of German pretensions. The small pacifist section in France and Britain welcomed Stockholm as a step towards the realization of their desires, since in their view any peace was just, and all war unjust.

While opinion was thus confused, Mr. Arthur Henderson returned from Petrograd. Originally he had been strongly opposed to the idea of Stockholm, but his stay in Russia had convinced him that something must be done to conciliate the extremists of the soviets if Kerenski was to remain in power. He also held that a conference would result in an exposure of Germany which would strengthen the hands of the democracies opposing her. Mr. Henderson was one of the most trusted leaders of British Labour; he had been unswerving in his support of the war, and he had first-hand experience of the Russian situation. His views were, therefore, entitled to all respect. Unfortunately he forgot, as a member of the War Cabinet, what was due to his colleagues. The British Government had already declared explicitly against Stockholm on any terms. Mr. Henderson accompanied the Russian delegates to Paris to discuss with the French Socialists the conditions on which they should go to Stockholm. The French majority and the Russians decided that any resolutions arrived at should be binding; Mr. Henderson and his British colleagues insisted that the meeting should only be consultative. On 10th August the special conference of the British Labour Party in London, by a majority of 1,296,000 votes, declared that the invitation to Stockholm should be accepted, but only on condition that the conference was consultative and not mandatory. This resolution was obtained mainly by Mr. Henderson's influence; and it was not easy to see its point, for it accepted a conference on terms which the Russians and the French majority had expressly declined. Next day Mr. Henderson resigned his seat in the War Cabinet, and was succeeded by Mr. G. N. Barnes.

There seemed much to be said at the time for Mr. Henderson's view of the tactical value of a conference, properly handled, to the Allied cause. Subsequent events were to make it plain that these arguments were not substantial. The German delegates did not mean business, and would have declined to be forced into the debating *impasse* which their enemies had intended for them; while it was soon apparent that no conference on any terms could have seriously checked the rising tide of anarchy in Russia. Moreover, Western socialism was not really in love with the project. It was preponderatingly national and patriotic, and only a small

minority hankered for the *Internationale*. Ten days after the first vote of the British Labour Party, a second congress saw the miners change front and the majority for Stockholm drop to a handful, while it refused the smaller socialist sections, which were the most keenly interested, the right of separate representation. On 4th September the Trades Union Congress at Blackpool, by a majority of nearly three millions, affirmed the necessity of an international labour conference as a preliminary to a lasting peace, but declared that any international conference at the present moment was undesirable.

So much for the Stockholm card on which, in the spring and early summer, Germany had staked largely. It had failed, because the ingenious *politique* had found himself faced by earnest and intransigent idealists who did not talk the same language. But it had produced certain curious reactions within Germany herself. In June Scheidemann was back in Berlin, expounding to his masters the situation as he had found it. He told his Government that, if they wished to drive a wedge into the democracies opposed to them, they must undertake some spectacular measures of reform.\* Other reasons were present to support this counsel. Unless German bureaucracy softened its voice, and spoke smooth things of liberty and peace, it would alienate its new and unconscious allies, the Russian extremists, and so frustrate that primary object of German policy, the break-up of the Russian army and the decomposition of the Russian state. There was the trouble we have seen brewing with Austria, who, under her new monarch, seemed to be moving towards an inconsequent liberalism, and whose Foreign Minister did not cease to ingeminate peace. The Emperor Charles, too, had been engaging in secret overtures to France, in which he showed himself prepared to bargain with territory in German hands — overtures which, when disclosed a year later, did not endear him to the Berlin Court. Finally, in Germany itself there was a growing desire for reform. There had always been a sickly plant of that species, but during the first years of war it had shrivelled and died down. Now there had come reviving showers from the East. Even the orderly German populace could not be wholly insensitive to the amazing things which were astir beyond the Dvina. They had suffered and endured greatly; they had been shorn, and had been dumb before

\* See his article in *Vorwärts*, of 24th June, 1917: "Germany, standing as she does safe to the four winds — Germany, who has not yielded to the strength of any conqueror, must grant her own reforms to her own people."

their shearers; but they were beginning to find a voice. No sophistry could disguise the fact that they had an unduly small share in the government of their country, and it was unpleasant to be held up in a world of free men as the only slaves. The phenomenon was something far short of conversion. It was a stirring in sleep rather than an awakening. But the shrewd masters of Germany were not willing to risk an outbreak if a judicious anodyne could be administered, the more especially as the drug which was a soothing syrup at home might be made a fiery irritant for their foes.

The need was intensified by the passionate general desire for peace, and a speedy peace. The discomfort of the land had become appalling. Arras and Messines had not been cheering, and the situation in Russia had not developed sufficiently to ease the strain. The submarine campaign, from which so much had been promised, had failed to give the expected results. German foreign policy, as shown by the rupture with America, and the bungling intrigues in Mexico and Switzerland, had been one long series of fiascoes. Moreover, forebodings as to the economic future after the war were drawing in like a dark cloud about the minds of the captains of industry and the trading classes, and the gloom was infecting the humbler folk who depended upon them for their livelihood. It was realized that the Russian formula of "peace without annexations" might be used to save German credit, and to secure her in her most vital gains from the war, while at the same time it would be in tune with the democratic jargon fashionable among her opponents. Only a few hot-headed extremists seemed to stand between the German people and that peace which they so gravely needed.

It was in the Reichstag itself that the storm broke. The great governing parties, apart from the Conservatives on the extreme right and the Minority Socialists on the extreme left, were the Catholic Centre, the National Liberals, the Radicals, and the Majority Socialists. In May, when the Imperial Chancellor had refused to state his peace terms, he had been supported by a *bloc* consisting of the Centre, the Radicals, and the National Liberals. Now the *bloc* suddenly added to itself the Majority Socialists, and so embraced two-thirds of the whole Reichstag, and, instead of supporting the Chancellor, it went into opposition. The immediate occasion was a speech delivered in the secret session on Friday, 6th July, by Herr Erzberger, Count Czernin's confidant, the leader of the democratic wing of the Catholic Centre. He attacked



the Government with great candour and vehemence, criticizing the conduct of the war and emphasizing the failure of the submarine. He demanded far-reaching reforms in both domestic and foreign policy, and a declaration in favour of peace without annexations or indemnities.

The consequences were dramatic. The Chancellor attempted a reply, but failed to convince the House. The four Central parties formed a new *bloc*, pledged to demand reform of the Prussian constitution, parliamentary government throughout the Empire, and a declaration of war aims on the lines laid down by Erzberger. The Emperor hastened to Berlin, and Hindenburg and Ludendorff were summoned from General Headquarters. The Crown Prince came also, for it was the Brandenburg fashion to summon the heir to any conference which concerned the future of the family estates. The first plan was to throw a sop to the malcontents by certain concessions as to Prussian reform. On Wednesday, 11th July, the Emperor issued a decree expanding his Easter message, and making the suffrage for the Prussian Diet not only direct and secret, but also equal. The sop did not satisfy. The *bloc* remained in opposition, and continued to demand the introduction of parliamentary government generally, and a resolution on war aims. For a week the Reichstag was thoroughly out of hand, and its disorder brought about Bethmann-Hollweg's fall. During that week his resignation was offered and accepted. The Emperor endeavoured to save him, but the military chiefs had decided that they could no longer work with him, and had themselves written out their resignations.

It could not have been otherwise. He had failed to control the Reichstag, and his Imperial master must either get rid of him, or turn over the management of affairs to the parliamentary majority and become a constitutional sovereign. The Chancellor's sympathies were in the main with the malcontents, but he knew that he could never secure an assent to their demands from the ruling elements in the German State. He was left without friends. Himself a *politique*, he had tried to keep the balance between the party of reform and the party of reaction. His purpose was intelligent and honourable; but, as so often happens to trimmers, he had alienated both sides. The conservatives and the Pan-Germans regarded him as a weakling, and the reformers looked upon him as a mere tool and hack. He belonged to no party, and therefore none took the trouble to defend him. He had not succeeded in his policy, for instead of being a *trait d'union*

between opposites, he had become the butt of both. He had committed the unpardonable sin in the eyes of his master, for he had failed to keep the peace among the talkers in the Reichstag, whom the bureaucracy were obliged to tolerate but could not love. The *politique* gets little justice when he fails. The anxious harassed, well-meaning, reasonably honest, and essentially maladroït statesman who had fallen from power will in all likelihood fare better at the hands of future historians than he did with the journalists of his own age and country. It will be put to his credit that he saw further into the problem than most of his fellow-citizens; that he sought honestly what he believed to be the welfare of his country; and that he had a perception of facts denied to his showier rivals. The mere fact that an Imperial Chancellor should resign because of an uproar in the Reichstag was significant enough. His office was the keystone of the German constitution. Parliamentary combinations came and went, but the Chancellor remained. During the forty-six years of the German Empire's existence there had been only five chancellors. He was not a creature of the Reichstag; he came to it from above, from the Emperor's cabinet, to announce a policy and demand its assent. He was the mouthpiece of the Emperor, and if his hearers flouted him, they flouted the Imperial authority.

For a brief week Germany trembled on the brink of constitutional government. The recalcitrant *bloc* had a majority, but it could not use it, for it had no adequate leaders. It squandered itself on barren intrigues and conferences, but it had one sensational triumph. On 19th July it carried by a majority of more than one hundred a motion on war aims. This celebrated resolution declared that the object of the war was solely to defend the liberty, independence, and territorial integrity of Germany; that the Reichstag stood for peace and understanding between parties, and that annexations and political and economic oppression were contrary to such a peace. This was a definite challenge to the Pan-Germans; more, it was a denial of the ideals for which the German Government had explicitly undertaken the war. It made havoc of the "German Peace" based on a comprehensive "rectification" of frontiers and a wide economic hegemony, for which Tirpitz, Reventlow, and even the milder pedants of *Mittleuropa* had argued. It was in substance a condemnation of Germany's policy for the past half-century.

But in the absence of leadership it was a mere pious opinion. The Emperor took no notice of it, and parliamentary government



in Germany died as suddenly as it had been born. The Reichstag was not consulted in the appointment of the new Chancellor. Three names were presented to the Emperor by the military chiefs, and, though they hoped for Prince Bülow or Tirpitz, he chose the one which seemed to him to be the safest. This was a certain Dr. Georg Michaelis, an official sixty years old, who had done useful work in the Food Control Department. He was almost unknown to the public, being one of those types bred by the German bureaucracy which rise to great executive power without ever coming into the limelight of public opinion. He was selected because he was docile and safe, and was believed to be a competent administrator. His political sympathies were known to be on the conservative side. The friendly press could only praise him in terms which augured ill for his success; he was greeted as an "absolute Prussian, in whose veins runs the categorical imperative." Helfferich, whose position had seemed precarious, was made Vice-Chancellor, and given the Ministry of the Interior, as well as the vice-presidency of the Prussian Ministry. Zimmermann, who had conspicuously failed at the Foreign Office, was succeeded by Baron von Kuhlmann, an urbane and adroit diplomat, a master of persuasive speech, and in policy far removed from the intransigence of the military school. He was to act as the velvet glove for the mailed fist.

From the start the "absolute Prussian" was in trouble. He had to deal with the Reichstag resolution of 19th July, and the demand for parliamentary government. The latter subject he left untouched, and on the former he produced a masterpiece of equivocation. He professed to accept it, "as he understood it"; but he added so many conditions and qualifications in his understanding of it that it was obvious he meant to throw it over as soon as he felt himself sufficiently strong. The whole tenor of his first speech was reactionary, save that he did not insist upon the indemnities which Helfferich had been accustomed to proclaim. The worthy man was indeed in a hopeless *impasse*. He could not speak pleasant things of a democracy in which he and his masters did not believe. He could orate on the merits of the submarine campaign, or the strength of the German front, or the breakdown of Brussilov's last offensive, but he was far too angular to play skilfully Kuhlmann's part of the good liberal and progressive facing a world of reactionary enemies. His courtesies towards the German reform party and the Russian extremists suggested the case of a respectable matron who, in order to save the credit of a favourite

son, is compelled to be civil to a cocotte. He was soon outclassed by Kuhlmann, who was a born intriguer. The new Foreign Secretary let it be known that he intended to produce an "atmosphere" favourable to negotiation — not for the sake of an honest peace, but in order to make strife among the Allies, and convince each that the other was in secret relations with the enemy. Apart from the folly of his preliminary announcement, he played his game with skill and unwearying industry. He harped cunningly on every pacifist string in Allied countries. He toiled to make Kerenski's position impossible, and to break up the last remnant of Russian order. He came to an understanding with Austria, so that Berlin and Vienna might speak with the same voice; and he sheltered himself behind the latter in many of his intrigues, since a lingering friendliness towards Austria was still to be found among many to whom Germany was anathema. In every neutral country he had his agents busy staging the picture of the first of the world's military powers burning with zeal to take the lead of the world's democracies.

Presently a pacific wind blew from another quarter. In a Note dated 1st August, but not published till the middle of the month, the Vatican invited the belligerent States to consider concrete proposals for peace. These were the diminution of armaments, the establishment of arbitration in international disputes, the "freedom of the seas," a general condonation as to the damage done by the war, a general restitution of occupied territory, and an examination in a friendly spirit of other territorial questions, such as Armenia, Poland, and the Balkans. There was much in the Note of sound sense and provident statesmanship, for, as the recent history of the world has proved, indemnities do not indemnify, and from no culprit can payment for the damage of war be extracted without a certain loss to the payee. But in the circumstances of the moment it was impossible that the Allies could see in this bloodless wisdom anything but evidence of a bias on behalf of the principal wrong-doer. The detached attitude towards atrocities perpetrated on Catholic countries and Catholic churches fell strangely on their ears. In effect it seemed to them that the Vatican asked for the restoration of the *status quo ante bellum*, a settlement which three-fourths of Germany would have gladly welcomed, and which would have been wholly in German interests. Its sympathies — they thought — were with the old Catholic monarchies — with Austria, with Bavaria — and against the Western democracies. The bias was natural and could

not be hidden, and its neutrality appeared to them little more than a diplomatic pose. The Vatican was, indeed, faced with a problem which one of the great thirteenth-century Pontiffs might have solved, but which was far beyond the capacity of a Benedict XV. To the Note Berlin, after taking some weeks to consider the question, responded with enthusiasm,\* welcoming negotiations on the lines which the Pope had suggested, and professing that it had drawn the sword for no other purpose than to defend right against might. President Wilson, on behalf of the Allies, issued a reply which went to the heart of the matter. "It is manifest," he wrote, "that no part of this programme can be successfully carried out unless the restitution of the *status quo ante* furnishes a firm and satisfactory basis for it. The object of this war is to deliver the free peoples of the world from the menace and the actual power of a vast military establishment controlled by an irresponsible Government which, having secretly planned to dominate the world, proceeded to carry the plan out without regard either to the sacred obligations of treaty or the long-established practice and long-cherished principles of international action and honour; which chose its own time for the war; delivered its blow fiercely and suddenly; stopped at no barrier of law or of mercy; swept a whole continent within the tide of blood — not the blood of soldiers only, but the blood of innocent women and children also, and of the helpless poor; and now stands balked but not defeated, the enemy of four-fifths of the world. This Power is not the German people. It is the ruthless master of the German people. It is no business of ours how that great people came under its control or submitted to its temporary zest, to the domination of its purpose; but it is our business to see to it that the rest of the world is no longer left to its handling. To deal with such a Power by way of peace upon the plan proposed by his Holiness the Pope would, so far as we can see, involve a recuperation of its strength and a renewal of its policy; would make it necessary to create a permanent hostile combination of the nations against the German people, who are its instruments."

During August and September Michaelis passed from blunder to blunder, while Kuhlmann was busy with his hints and overtures. The latter had many difficulties to encounter. The follies of Count Luxburg in the Argentine and the futile German conspiracies in Mexico and elsewhere, which the Government of Washington periodically revealed, were not calculated to exalt the repute

\* The enthusiasm did not extend to General Headquarters. Ludendorff objected to the Note, and disapproved of the German reply.



of German honour. Moreover, the civilian statesman was always in opposition to the military chiefs, who not only were intransigent in their war aims, but had an awkward habit of blurting out truths which wrecked the laborious *camouflage* of the Foreign Minister. It was hard to work cunningly on the psychology of enemy peoples when at any moment a heavy-footed soldier might scatter the web. It was hard to labour for a German victory through peace, when simpler souls could only think of peace through a German victory. Nor must it be forgotten that the soldier ranked far higher in popular esteem than the politician. The territorial commands in Germany were indeed excessively unpopular, but not so General Headquarters. The latter might be anti-democratic and unbending, but it had clean hands, and maintained the old tradition of the incorruptible German public servant. Muddling and corruption in civil administration, and scandalous war-profiteering, had caused the ordinary politician to stink in the nostrils of the country. Few honest Germans, whether socialist or not, could prefer the personalities of Kuhlmann, Erzberger, and Scheidemann to those of Ludendorff and Hindenburg.

Throughout these months there were so many forces at work within Germany that a clear distinction was impossible. Kuhlmann continued to make an "atmosphere" by hinting at the evacuation and restoration of Belgium on easy terms. The desperate economic condition of Austria moved opinion towards peace, and the growing demoralization of Russia swung it back towards war. Indeed, we may say that the spectacle of the collapse of all government in Russia was the most potent weapon to weaken the reform movement in Germany, and to content the people with their traditional system. Propaganda was officially conducted everywhere, even among the troops at the fronts, in favour of a "German" peace by victory as against a "Scheidemann" peace by negotiations, and a new book, Freytag-Loringhoven's *Deductions from the World War*, preached the strictest doctrines of German militarism as the only hope of the future. The export of this work abroad was prohibited, as inimical to Kuhlmann's peace "atmosphere"; but its circulation was officially promoted within Germany itself, and it had undoubtedly a high propaganda value. Even those who did not subscribe to the doctrines of the Deputy Chief of the General Staff had some sympathy with the maxim which von der Goltz used to quote with approval — "the Roman principle never to conclude peace in times of disaster." Though they had abandoned the extreme hopes of the first months of war,

they were clear that Germany had been the victor in the struggle, and that she must emerge not only without loss but with some positive gain. This was the general temper of the German people, and it hardened as Russia went deeper into the mire, and the attack of the Allies in the West failed to accomplish its purpose. The resolution of 19th July was becoming forgotten, and the peace visions of midsummer were fading out of the air. It needed only some striking success in the field to range the great bulk of public opinion on the side of the military chiefs.

When the Reichstag met in October it was in an electric atmosphere. There had been grave disorders, amounting to mutiny, in the Fleet. The militarist propaganda, encouraged by the Government, seemed a defiance of the Reichstag majority, and a turning to ridicule of the resolution of 19th July. Moreover, the pacific speeches of Kuhlmann and Czernin had not only unsettled the weaker minds among the Allied peoples, but had left the ordinary German moderate in a very complete confusion of his own. On Saturday, 6th October, the Majority Socialists introduced an interpellation on the subject of the Pan-German propaganda encouraged by the authorities. General von Stein, the Minister of War, replied by pooh-poohing the whole affair. He was badly received, and was followed by Helfferich, who was shouted down. Upon this the Reichstag, thoroughly dissatisfied, took the bold step on 8th October of referring back to the Committee the new war vote of 300 millions. That day Michaelis himself addressed the Main Committee, and Helfferich made a kind of apology. Next day, 9th October, the situation grew worse, when the Independent Socialist, Herr Dittmann, referred to the naval mutiny, and accused the Government of treating the sailors unjustly. Michaelis replied by declaring that officials might belong to any party they liked, but that he personally considered the Independent Socialists outside the pale of patriotic parties. He was succeeded by Admiral von Capelle, who read a speech apparently composed with the help of the Chancellor, in which he declared that he had documentary evidence in his possession which showed that the chief instigator of the mutiny had worked in collaboration with Independent Socialists like Dittmann and Haase. An angry debate ensued, in which the Government were attacked for their use of the court-martial evidence, without allowing the incriminated members of the House to hear it beforehand or to examine the witnesses. The Chancellor at first associated himself with the charge made by Capelle; but a few days later he made



matters worse by asking for Capelle's resignation, as if he were trying to escape by throwing the blame on a subordinate. The Reichstag passed the votes, and adjourned till December, but it was clear that Michaelis could not meet the House again.

On the 21st the Emperor returned to Berlin after paying visits to his friends the monarchs of Bulgaria and Turkey. He had to find a new Chancellor; and the choice was not easy, for he must have a man who could manage the Reichstag and at the same time be acceptable to General Headquarters. His choice ultimately fell on Count Georg von Hertling, a Bavarian of seventy-four, who had spent most of his life as a professor in the University of Bonn, and had been leader of the Centre in the Reichstag till he quarrelled with Bethmann-Hollweg over the Jesuits. He was a devout Catholic, a profound student of St. Augustine, and a skilful parliamentarian, whose private creed was anti-parliamentary. It seemed incredible that such a man should be acceptable to the Socialists and Liberals — or to Prussia at large, for the office of Chancellor carried with it the appointment of Prussian Minister President. To avoid future trouble it was desirable to make certain of a working majority in the Reichstag, so the Chancellor-designate went round cap in hand to the different parties soliciting their support. For a week or two he met with no success, and it seemed as if he must return to Munich; but the adroit Kuhlmann took up the task, and devised a formula on which all the party leaders, except the Socialists, could agree. So it came about that on 31st October an elderly Bavarian ultramontane became Chancellor of the Empire and Minister President of Prussia. The curious noted that this befell on the four hundredth anniversary of the day on which Martin Luther had nailed his theses to the church door of Wittenberg.

The appointment, though it seemed at first sight paradoxical, was shrewdly calculated. Count Hertling had affinities with all the governing parties, and was identified with none. Conservatives were inclined to accept one who had always been a conservative; Liberals looked with a certain friendliness on a man who had risen into repute as a parliamentarian, and had accepted the resolution of 19th July. The truth was that his coming meant the rout of the reformers. Much was made in foreign countries of the fact that he had not been appointed till the assent of the Reichstag majority was assured, and this was hailed as a triumph of constitutionalism. But to argue thus was to misread the situation. The consultation of the politicians was only a device to prevent

the trouble from which Michaelis had suffered. It was a private arrangement, and the unshaken power of the autocracy was proved by the fact that such a figure could be forced on the country at all. The thing was possible only because the discontents of the summer had been decisively quelled. The stirrings of reform, the aspirations towards peace, still existed, but they were diffuse, impotent, and voiceless. Russia's descent to chaos had suddenly become accelerated; and during October the Austro-German armies had won a great victory in Italy, and were sweeping towards the Po. At the news every section, except the Minority Socialists, became converted to a "German" peace. The press and the politicians, who had been coquetting with negotiations and making eyes at democracy, cried as loudly for conquest as they had done in 1914. Ephraim was once more joined to his idols, and revealed himself as wholly impenitent and unchanged. The smooth speeches of Kuhlmann could scarcely be heard for the din of his exultant countrymen behind him.

## CHAPTER LXXXIV

### THE SUMMER AT VERDUN AND ON THE AISNE

*June 3—November 2, 1917*

Pétain's Policy—The Summer Fighting on the Aisne—The French Fourth Army at Moronvillers—Guillaumat's Advance at Verdun—The Aisne Heights cleared.

BEFORE the great sallies from the enemy fortress began in East and West, there was to be, besides the long struggle in Flanders, one last attack of the besiegers. We left the French armies when in the first days of June they had won the main position of the Chemin des Dames, and had driven the enemy from his observation posts on the Aisne heights, while they themselves were looking down into the vale of the Ailette, and east of Rheims held the whole summit-ridge of the Moronvillers *massif*. The story of the summer which followed is one of fierce and persistent German attacks to win back the lost ground. The enemy's motives were partly defensive, for even the modified success of the French on the Aisne endangered the left flank of the Siegfried Line; partly the desire to restore the waning credit of the Imperial Crown Prince by something which could be called a victory; and partly to keep up the *moral* of his troops by an offensive in a safe area, since elsewhere on the long front they were being remorselessly driven backward by Haig. The Second Battle of the Aisne finished, so far as the main operations were concerned, with the capture of the California Plateau on 5th May; but it was destined to drag out with much sharp and costly fighting for another hundred days.

The first task of Pétain was to hold what he had won, but a second project was occupying his thoughts. His urgent duty was to nurse back to assurance and cheerfulness the sorely tried

armies of France. Hence very slowly and carefully he planned an assault, when his men should have recovered confidence after their successful defence and be eager for the *revanche*. He chose Verdun, where France fought always with a special pride, and he chose the one section of the Aisne heights to which the enemy still clung. The battle of France during the summer and autumn of 1917 fell, therefore, into two stages — a long period of "stone-walling" against the German counter-strokes, and two small, short, perfectly staged, and victorious offensives.

From 3rd June to 20th June there was a lull on the Aisne. Four points in the French position were marked out for enemy attacks — the extreme left north of Vauxaillon, where the line approached the Ailette; the Malmaison sector, where the enemy held a strong position on the northern rim of the tableland; the narrows of the hog's back at Hurtebise; and the plateaux of Vauclerc and California forming the butt of the range above Craonne. On 20th June the first point, between the Ailette and Laffaux Mill, was hotly attacked by "shock" troops and the first positions taken, but by the next evening the French had recovered the ground. On 25th June it was the turn of the French to strike. The spur north of Hurtebise, called the Hurtebise Finger, was held by the enemy, and it commanded from the west the Vauclerc plateau. The spur was honeycombed by the great limestone grotto known as the Dragon's Cave. The southern entrance had been closed by a shell explosion, but the north entrance and the cavern itself were in German hands. To win the Finger not only the crest above ground but the grotto beneath must be captured, for otherwise the enemy might have blown up the whole spur. After a hard struggle, during the day of 25th June, the spur was carried, the northern outlet of the cave seized, and a thousand prisoners taken.

In the last days of June the Germans attacked in the Hurtebise area, and from Corbény against the eastern bluff of the heights. On 3rd July came the first of the Crown Prince's more serious efforts. The VII. Army under von Boehn launched an attack on a twelve-mile front, from Malmaison to the woods of Chevreux, north of Craonne. After an artillery bombardment of only half an hour the "shock" troops advanced at eight in the morning, followed by some six infantry divisions. Their aim was the whole length of the hog's back held by the French from east of Malmaison to California. But the French were not to be taken unawares. Their barrage caught the first wave of the attack in the open, and



after a long day's fighting the enemy was driven off the plateau. On this occasion the Germans were advancing from the low ground in the Ailette valley, so Boehn's next attempt was from Malmaison, where he held a strong position on the plateau itself. Here the French front ran into a salient, and the enemy's aim was to cut it off and drive the French off all that section of the heights. At 3.45 a.m. on the morning of 8th July the German infantry advanced as soon as their guns opened fire. Wave after wave followed during the day, and far into the night; but they gained nothing, except on the Chevreigny spur, where for twenty-four hours they secured a mile or so of the French front trenches. These were won back on the morning of the 9th, and for his heavy losses Boehn had nothing to show.

On 19th July a division of the Prussian Guard made another attempt to storm the plateaux of Vauclerc, the Casemates, and California, between Hurtebise and Craonne. It was the most serious of the enemy's strokes, for, if these positions were lost, the French, their left threatened by the enemy at Malmaison, would be driven off the crest of the ridge back to the Aisne valley. On the six-mile front more than 300 German guns were concentrated. The enemy troops had to force the northern slopes of the hills, where the French barrage dealt death among them; while the French troops on the little plateaux, each of which was about a third of a mile broad, were the targets for the German bombardment. The battle began at midday on the 19th, and five regiments of the Prussian Guard managed to reach the edge of the tableland. They were flung back, but continued to hold half a mile of the French position between the Casemates and California. The attack in the same area was renewed later in the evening, and next day a subsidiary attack was launched to the west between Malmaison and Hurtebise. On the 22nd the Prussian Guard, now reinforced by a reserve and a Bavarian division, advanced anew against the plateaux, and won a precarious foothold at California. On the 23rd there was no infantry fighting, but a desperate bombardment from both sides; and on the 24th the defence swept the enemy off the California ground. That same day a strong assault in the Hurtebise sector was also repelled, an assault which was repeated fruitlessly every day till the 29th. The close of July saw the end of the German effort.

The attempt to restore the credit of the heir to the German throne had been singularly unsuccessful. From 5th May onward till the discontinuance of the action the Germans on this limited



front had flung in no less than forty-nine divisions.\* They had gained no ground, and they had lost heavily, especially among their picked *Sturmtruppen*. German tactics were in a state of transition, both for offence and defence, and the Aisne discredited the first crude use of "shock" battalions, as the later stages of Third Ypres discredited the "pill-box" and Armin's method of a retired front. But the main result of the battle was the new confidence which it inspired in the armies of France. They had endured against odds and yielded nothing, and their temper was becoming set for an offensive.

During these months the Fourth Army at Moronvillers was engaged in various small but successful operations. On 9th June Anthoine, departing to the First Army in Flanders, yielded his command to Gouraud, who in the Argonne and in Gallipoli had won fame as a leader of men. The new general was not satisfied with his front, especially between Mont Cornillet and Mont Blond; for though he held the two summits, the enemy had the Flensburg trench on the saddle between, and awkward positions on the northern slopes of Mont Blond which might form a starting-point for a new offensive. It was Gouraud's wish to cut off this salient, and he entrusted the work to the French 132nd Division. The task was to be undertaken after careful reconnaissance by selected parties of bombers. These started just before dawn on 21st June. The Germans were expecting an attack, and had strengthened their posts in the Flensburg trench and put down a heavy barrage. The operation was completely successful; the Flensburg and Blond trenches were won, and the enemy had lost all chance of observation over the southern slopes of the Moronvillers range, except for two positions, one on the saddle between Mont Blond and Mont Haut, and one on the western side of the latter hill.

Fritz von Below now brought up three fresh divisions with the intention of regaining the crest line. But Gouraud anticipated his plans. On 12th and 13th July the French guns deluged with shells the position of the new divisions. On 14th July — the *jour de France*, which had been celebrated the year before on the Somme by the capture of the German second line — Gouraud attacked at 7.30 in the evening, on two fronts of 800 and 600 yards, with the purpose of clearing the saddle between Mont Blond and Mont Haut and extending the French hold on the Téton. Within half

\* During, approximately, the same period in 1916 the enemy used only twenty-five divisions on the rather narrower Verdun front. The changed circumstances in the East enabled him to be more lavish in his use of troops.

an hour he had secured all his objectives and taken some hundreds of prisoners. Violent counter-attacks followed, and during the night the saddle changed hands for an hour or two, but on the Téton the Germans made no progress. On the night of the 22nd the enemy attacked the French lines north-west of Mont Cornillet, on the 25th the whole front on Mont Haut, and on the 26th he made no less than five separate assaults. By the end of the month he had given up the task, and the Moronvillers area had become a French fortress defending the plain of Châlons and threatening the flank of the German position in Champagne. Pétain was now free to turn his mind to his offensive elsewhere.

The Verdun area was held by the French Second Army, under General Guillaumat, who had commanded with distinction the 1st Corps at the Battle of the Somme; the enemy force was the V. Army, under Gallwitz. When the great Battle of Verdun died away in July 1916, the French line from left to right covered the village of Avocourt and Avocourt Redoubt, the southern slope of Mort Homme and Hill 304, Charny, Bras, the Froideterre ridge, a part of Fleury, Forts Souville and Tavannes, and so to the Woëvre. Nivelle's winter battles retook Douaumont and Vaux, Vacherauville, Poivre Hill, Louvemont, Bezonvaux, and Hardaumont, restoring the French front to its position on February 24, 1916, the fourth day of the battle. It was not the old position which Sarraill had prepared in the great retreat, and it had obvious weak points. Any German movement in this sector must, therefore, be jealously watched.

In June Gallwitz began to show signs of activity. Reconnoitring attacks were delivered on the left bank of the Meuse, and, to cloak this movement, feints were made in the south at Les Eparges and the St. Mihiel salient. Meantime 500 guns were massed behind the Avocourt-Cumières sector, where the French line ran through the south-eastern corner of Avocourt Wood across the Esnes-Malancourt road and along the south skirts of Hill 304 and Mort Homme to the river north of Chattancourt. The Esnes highway crossed the ridge by a little hollow, the Col de Pommerieux, which, if won by the enemy, would enable him to outflank the French lines on Hill 304. The German 10th Reserve Division was allotted for the attack, and trained behind the front on an exact model of the country. Of this Guillaumat was advised by a curious chance. A French airman, flying behind the lines, saw a set of trenches which he recognized as identical with those on





# GUILLAUMAT'S ADVANCE AT VERDUN.

(Facing p. 26.)

GUILAUMAT'S ADVANCE AT VEROUN.

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Hill 304. Gallwitz launched his attack on the afternoon of 28th June on a front of 2,000 yards. His "shock" troops carried the front trenches and won to the Col de Pommerieux. A French battalion in the Avocourt Wood repelled ten assaults and held their ground for twelve hours, till every survivor was wounded and the order came to withdraw. All next day the battle lasted, both east and west of Hill 304, and there were many marvellous cases of the tenacity of small units. A squadron of forty dismounted Breton dragoons, for example, between Hill 304 and Mort Homme, beat off several companies of "shock" troops, and held the Germans in this sector, more than half being killed or wounded. West of Hill 304 the enemy had gained some ground, and on the 30th and the succeeding days he made a great effort to debouch from his new positions. The fighting was bitter and long on the slopes and in Avocourt Wood, but by the 6th of July the German assault had lost its vigour and ebbed away.

On the night of 7th July Guillaumat began his counter-offensive. That night by a brilliant little action he cleared away three enemy salients on Mort Homme and Hill 304. The weather was bad, and not till the 17th was Lebocq, the General commanding in the sector, ready for a larger operation. The German forces had suffered severely under the French bombardment. The 10th Reserve Division had been strengthened by elements of the 48th, newly arrived from Russia, and the 29th was in process of relieving it when Lebocq struck. At 6.15 on the morning of that day, after an exceptionally heavy artillery preparation, the French 51st and 87th regiments, with three other battalions in support, attacked from Avocourt Wood to Mort Homme. They retook the Col de Pommerieux, and in half an hour had advanced half a mile and gained all their objectives with few casualties. The old line had been recaptured, and though during the rest of the month there were small counter-attacks at various points from Les Eparges to Avocourt, it was never in serious danger.

All this was preparatory to the major offensive of August, upon which Pétain had decided as one of his two autumn battles. His aim was to restore the French front which had existed before the Crown Prince, on the morning of February 21, 1916, began the Battle of Verdun. The enemy was aware that a great attack was in contemplation, and he guessed that its chief area would be the left bank of the Meuse. On 17th August the divisions defending Mort Homme and Hill 304 were warned that they must expect to be attacked at any moment, and that they must depend



on their own resources. Their position was very strong, and they relied upon the great tunnels cut in the ridges for cover from the French bombardment, and upon the counter-bombardment of their new mustard-gas shells to check the advancing infantry. Gallwitz was prepared to fight as Armin was fighting at Ypres — holding his front line lightly, and waiting the chance of a counter-stroke while his assailants were still uncertain in their new positions.

Guillaumat surprised his opponents by many things, but mainly by the length of his front of assault. Not on the left bank of the river only, but on the whole fifteen miles from Avocourt Wood to the north of Bezonvaux, he made ready for an attack. On the right the advance was intended to be short, for at Bezonvaux his front made a sharp angle and he could not risk a counter-stroke from the Woëvre. From Friday, 17th August, the French guns never ceased, and the bald bleached tops of Mort Homme and Hill 304 became balder and more skeleton-like. On the evening of Sunday, the 19th, the whole landscape was a vast smoking altar. It was hot, dry weather, the dust lay inches deep on the roads, and the sky was shrouded in a fog of fumes and debris. Just before dawn on the morning of Monday, the 20th, the French infantry moved forward on the whole front. They found that the guns had done their work for them. Stores of the enemy's gas shells had been exploded by the French bombardment, and in one division three whole regiments had been put out of action. Almost at a bound the French cleared Avocourt Wood, seized the two summits of Mort Homme, where in the spring of 1916 so much blood had been spilled, carried the Wood of Cumières, and, pouring over the crest, occupied the Crows' Wood, which they had lost sixteen months before. East of the river the same division which in December 1916, under Muteau, had stormed the Côte du Poivre had now the task of clearing the Talou ridge and the loop of the Meuse towards Samogneux. Forcing its way through clouds of German gas it took Talou, and Champneuville beyond it. Farther to the right the French carried Hill 344 (lost on February 24, 1916), Mormont Farm, and Hill 240, north of Louvemont. The extreme right wing advanced some distance in the two woods of Fosses and Chaume. Gallwitz's counter-strokes missed their mark. He launched them at Avocourt Wood, at the Mort Homme, and at Hill 344; but the speed and fury of the French had demoralized the defence, and they came to nothing. Over 4,000 unwounded prisoners remained in Guillaumat's hands.

The position now was that the French encircled Hill 304 and

had won the main part of the ridge called the Goose's Crest, between the Forges brook and the Meuse, while on the right bank they had cut off the river loop. On Tuesday, the 21st, the east end of the Côte de l'Oie was taken and the village of Regnéville beyond it, while the front east of the river was brought into line by the capture of Samogneux and the whole northern slope of Hill 344. Gallwitz was thoroughly shaken. His counter-attacks all along the new front were beaten off with a contemptuous ease; and by Thursday evening the French centre had pressed well to the north of Mormont Farm, and the toll of captures had risen to 7,640 men and 24 guns. On Friday Hill 304 and the Bois Camard fell to a single rush, and the French left reached the southern bank of the Forges brook, between Haucourt and Bethincourt — an advance of some 2,000 yards. On Saturday, the 25th, fresh progress was made in this area; and on the Sunday, east of the river, the woods of Fosses and Beaumont were taken, and the skirts of the village of Beaumont reached. A German counter-attack, debouching from Wavrille Wood, was destroyed by the French artillery. On Monday, the 27th, there was fierce fighting around Beaumont, and with it the main action for the moment died down. Guillaumat had won practically all his objectives, and had a total of some 10,000 prisoners.

There was quiet for nearly a fortnight, and then on Saturday, 8th September, the French pushed forward north of the Fosses Wood, took the whole of the Chaume Wood, and secured the high ground which commanded the Wood of Caures. Next day the enemy counter-attacked furiously but without results, both there and north of Hill 344. Guillaumat had now secured what he desired. The enemy had been pushed far away from Verdun almost to the line from which he had moved on the first day of the great battles, and all the armies of France had been quickened to a new eagerness and hope by her success on this classic fighting ground.

The omens were thus happy for Pétain's second autumn battle. He chose that part of the Heights of the Aisne where the enemy still had a foothold, the western end of the Chemin des Dames between Allemant and Malmaison. The Second Battle of the Aisne in the spring had given the French the crown of the ridge, but only east of Hurtebise did they hold the northern rim. In all the western sector the Germans had a foothold on the plateau, and the French front ran practically in a straight line from Laffaux to

Hurtebise. Both sides had narrow standing room, both had a river behind them, and both operated from the same kind of base — a series of spurs splayed like the fingers of a hand, running on the German side to the vale of the Ailette, and on the French side to the Aisne. The villages behind the German lines were on the reverse slopes or on the flat. Pétain's aim was to clear the enemy wholly off the heights and to advance to the Ailette bank. He chose the triangle between the Aisne-Oise Canal and Soissons for his attempt, arguing rightly that if he could press back the enemy to the flats in this area he would compel a general retirement. The French forces were the Sixth Army, formerly under Mangin, and now under Maistre, who had once commanded the 21st Corps at Verdun. There were four corps in the army — the 11th, 14th, 39th, and Maistre's old 21st, now under that Degoutte whom we saw in command of the Moroccan Division at Moronvillers. Seven French divisions were allotted to the assault — the 13th, 27th, 28th, 38th, 43rd, 66th, and 67th. Opposed to Maistre was Boehn's German VII. Army. In the battle area the 2nd and 5th Divisions of the Prussian Guard were disposed around Fort Malmaison; on the right the 13th, on the left the 47th Reserve, and in support the 14th and the 211th.

Like Nivelle at Verdun and Plumer at Messines, Maistre staged his battle cunningly and with the minutest care. His initial front was four miles long — from Laffaux Mill to La Royère farm. The preliminary bombardment began on Wednesday, 17th October, and was directed mainly to breaking up the roofs and sealing up the entrances of the underground caverns which constituted one of the main German defences. Mont Parnasse, behind Malmaison, one of the biggest quarries, had been shattered by 16-inch shells several days before the attack. On the night of Monday, 22nd October, the bombardment increased in fury, and in the drizzle before dawn on the 23rd it rose to a terrific crescendo. At 5.15, in fog and rain, the French infantry crossed their parapets.

Their success was immediate and unbroken. The first rush brought them to a line from Le Fruty, on the Laffaux-Chavignon road, to the quarries of Bohéry. The next bound gave their centre the Fort of Malmaison. It would appear that, as happened on two occasions during Third Ypres, the French attack anticipated a German move by a quarter of an hour, and therefore caught the enemy in some confusion. There was stiff fighting in the Mont Parnasse quarry, where a German reserve division came up; but presently the French centre was descending the northern slopes

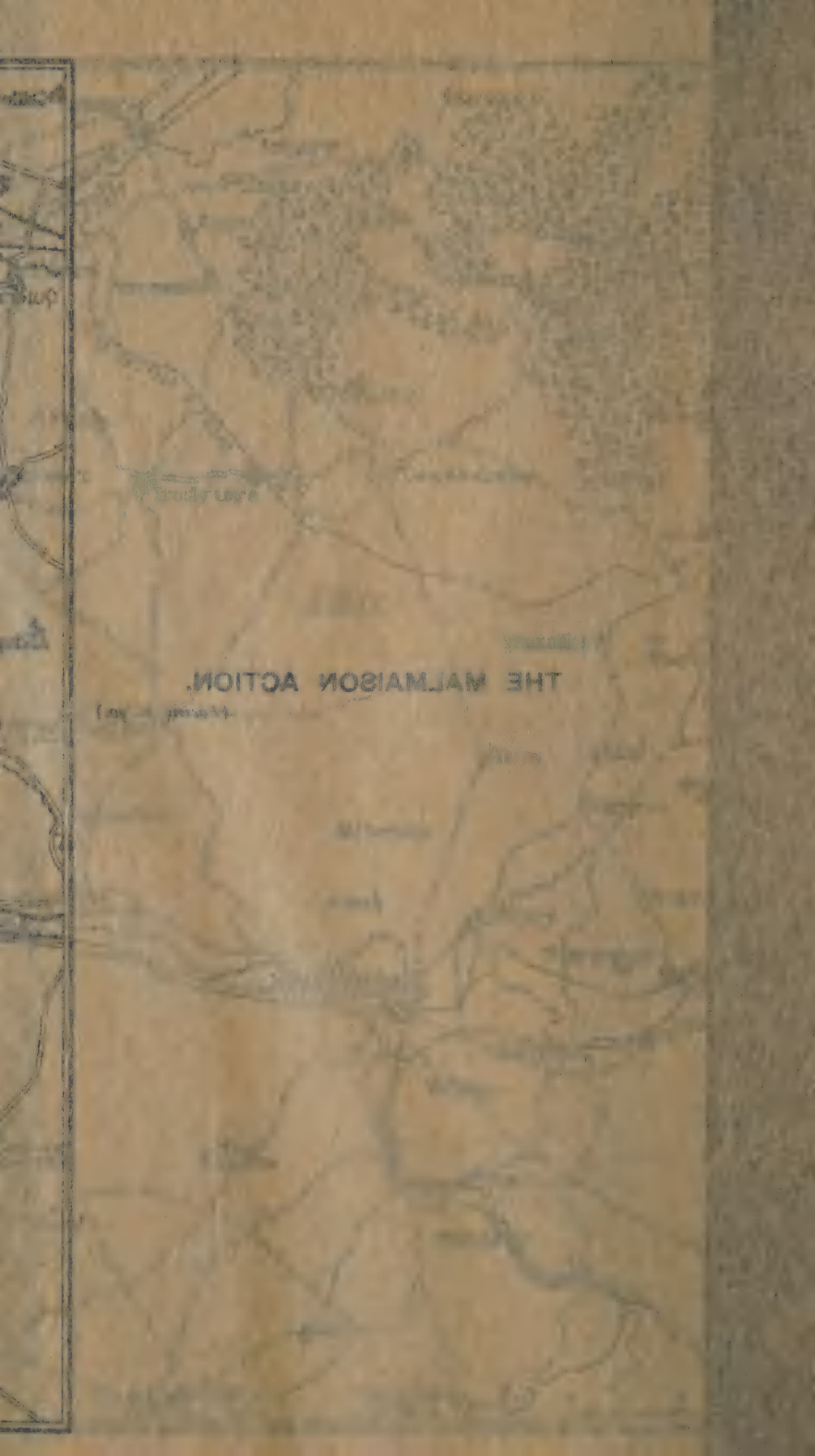


## THE MALMAISON ACTION.

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THE MALMAISON ACTION.

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of the heights and had taken the village of Chavignon. The place was of extreme importance, for it gave a clear view to Laon along the little valley of the Ardon, and the slopes above it commanded all the eastern course of the Ailette. Meantime the French left had taken the villages of Allemant and Vaudesson, and the right was on the crest overlooking Pargny and Filain. It was a victorious day. On a four-mile front an advance of two and a quarter miles had been made; and some 8,000 prisoners and many guns had been taken. The enemy was left in a position in which he could not hope to abide.

During the next three days Maistre swept on. He had not attacked the Mont des Singes, the spur which was the buttress of the German right, but he judged rightly that it must soon be evacuated. The French entered Pargny and Filain; they took Pinon in the flats, and pushed through the Pinon forest to the edge of the Aisne-Oise Canal. Presently the two armies faced each other across the marshy valley bottom. The enemy was in sore straits, for the new French positions commanded the flank of the Forest of Coucy and enfiladed his remaining front on the slopes of the Aisne hills east of Filain. On Friday, 2nd November, Boehn fell back altogether from the hills, beyond the Ailette and the canal, and the French entered Courteçon, Cerny-en-Laonnois, Ailles, and Chevreux, the villages which had seen the fiercest of the mid-summer fighting. Eleven thousand prisoners had been taken and over 200 guns. After a six months' battle the Heights of the Aisne, on which the enemy had for three years been entrenched, were now again in the hands of France.

## CHAPTER LXXXV

### THE DOWNFALL OF RUSSIA

*July 23–November 7, 1917*

End of Brussilov's Offensive—Kornilov appointed Commander-in-Chief—The Valour of Rumania—The Moscow Conference—Hutier takes Riga—Kerenski and Kornilov—The Bolsheviks make ready—Fall of Kerenski Government—Lenin and Trotski in Power.

ON 23rd July the Germans were in Tarnopol, the Russian Eleventh Army had gone to pieces, the Seventh and Eighth Armies were in retreat, and the whole Galician front had crumbled. It was not a military defeat, for the enemy had no great weight of numbers. It was not a breakdown from sheer physical exhaustion, for Russia as a whole had not suffered to the degree of France or Germany. It was the collapse of the spirit of a nation, a tragedy which no glozing phrases could conceal. Let us grant that the old Russia had been misgoverned; that, like the Sullan *régime* at Rome, she had been less a constitution or an empire than a gigantic system of police; that her national integration and self-consciousness were weak; and that the Revolution proclaimed many unexceptionable doctrines of autonomy and liberty and social reform. Unfortunately, the soul of a man or of a people is not saved by liberal professions. There is virtue in fighting for a narrow cause if the fighter translates it into his own homely loyalties, and is willing to undergo discipline and sacrifice and death for its sake; there is none in huzzaing for a generous creed and in practice surrendering honour and self-control for self-interest and easy dreams. There had been a true brotherhood in the old armies of the Tsar; there was little, save of the lips, in the mob that straggled back to the frontiers. Morally, the Russia of the Revolution, in spite of lofty declarations, was far below the community which it had destroyed. Steel and fire had given place to putty

and packthread, and the new vision, which should have been a spur to effort, had become a facile plea for irresolution. That something soft and boneless, oriental and apathetic, which was the flaw in the Russian character was now acclaimed as virtue.

The tale of the fate of Brussilov's armies is soon told. Kornilov was put in charge of the south-western front in place of Gutor, and he flung all his volcanic energy into the vain task of reconstruction. He had to check the retreat of the Eleventh and Seventh Armies, and disengage his own Eighth Army (now under Tcheremisov) from the awkward position south of the Dniester in which it had been placed by the defection in the north. Halicz and Stanislau were at once evacuated, the Sereth was crossed by Bothmer south of Tarnopol, and on the 24th the enemy was close on Trembovla and Buczacz. The German Emperor had arrived at the front to witness the easy triumph of order over revolution. The aim of the Austro-German Command was to push rapidly north of the Dniester so as to cut off the Russian forces in the Carpathians and the Bukovina. On 27th July the Eighth Army was on the line Kolomea-Zaleshchyki; on the last day of the month it was twenty miles farther back on the line Kutty-Sniatyn-Mielnica. By that date the Seventh and Eleventh Armies had been pushed beyond the river Zbrucz, which was the frontier of Russia. In places there were gallant stands against odds by various brigades, and the left of the Seventh Army fought stubbornly on the lower Sereth. The performance, too, of the British armoured cars in fighting unsupported delaying actions cannot be overpraised. But no isolated heroism could atone for the complete breakdown of the fighting machine. Erdeli, commanding the Eleventh Army, was murdered by a shot in the back from his own men, and Czernovitz and Kimpolung had fallen by the beginning of August. Kornilov was now standing desperately on his own frontier, barring the road to Odessa.

There was no reason why Prince Leopold should not have reached Odessa had the German High Command so desired. They had been fighting so far with comparatively few divisions, and, had they chosen to make a serious advance in the orthodox German manner, the way to southern Russia and the Black Sea shore was open before them. Kornilov was making a stout defence of the border river, but no man knew better than he that he had no army on which he could rely. Brussilov had been dismissed on 31st July, and Kornilov had taken his place as Commander-in-Chief, the fifth to hold that office since the outbreak of war.



Tcheremisov took over the south-western front, Denikin the western, and Klembovski the north, while Parski succeeded Radko Dmitrieff with the Twelfth Army. Nothing could be better proof of the confusion of the Russian commands than this constant transposition of generals. But the Central Powers halted, and did not pluck the fruit which lay ready to their hand. They had secured all that for the moment they desired. The armies of the Revolution had been given the *coup de grâce*. It remained to let the mischief work a little longer, till the precarious civil government of Kerenski should likewise topple over.

Meantime on the Rumanian Sereth and in the Moldavian passes Mackensen had no such easy task as fell to Boehm-Ermolli and Bothmer. In the middle of July the Rumanian front ran from the Oitoz Pass along the Putna valley to its junction with the Sereth east of Focsani. The Russian General Tcherbachev, who had led the Seventh Army in the Galician offensive of the previous year, was in command of the front, which was held on the north by the Russian Fourth Army and in the centre by the Rumanian Second Army under Avarescu. A considerable artillery strength had been accumulated, especially in Avarescu's area. On 24th July, when the Austrians were in Tarnopol, a bombardment began against the enemy position in the valley of the Susitza, a tributary of the Sereth, which was held by the right wing of the Austrian I. Army. This area was of great strategical importance, for it covered the short length of railway between Marasesti and Tecuciu, which connected the line from Focsani along the foot of the mountains that served the Rumanian front in the hill glens with the main line from Galatz to Jassy. At four in the morning of the 26th Avarescu attacked, and in three days' hard fighting drove the Austrians south to the Putna valley, taking some 3,000 prisoners. On 7th August Mackensen came to the rescue. Demoralization was spreading in the Russian Fourth Army, and in the Bistritza valley, which descends from the Bekas, whole regiments were deserting their posts.\* The time had arrived to break the Rumanian centre north and east of Focsani, and wrest from them the vital loop line. He pushed his way back to the Susitza, taking over 3,000 prisoners, crossed that stream, and came within a

\* We possess an account of the demoralization of this army, written by its Chief of Staff, General N. de Monkevitz (*La Décomposition de l'Armée Russe*, French trans., 1919). In July there were over 40,000 men who did nothing but talk on committees. All was over when the artillery, which had been the backbone, declared for immediate peace. The book is a tragic study in military pathology.

mile or two of Marasesti. Farther north in the Trotus valley the Austrians drove in the unstable Russian front, with the result that it had to be withdrawn to Ocna. Soon the enemy, in spite of desperate counter-attacks, had advanced five miles and taken 7,000 prisoners. Not Marasesti only was in jeopardy, but the junction of Adjutul, which was the key of the Carpathian lines. The Rumanian Government at Jassy were preparing to retire into south Russia.

On Tuesday, 14th August, Rumanian troops, who had replaced the Russians in the Trotus valley, counter-attacked from Ocna, and advanced for six miles. Their impetus, however, was soon exhausted, and once again they drew back towards the Sereth. Mackensen, farther south, pushed as far as the bridge where the Marasesti loop line crossed the Sereth. It was clear that the decisive battle would be fought for the crossing of the river, and for that purpose the German commander had brought up more than a dozen fresh divisions, including nine German. The whole front of a hundred miles from the mountains to Galatz was ablaze. The brunt of the fighting fell on the Rumanian First and Second Armies, and their difficulties were increased by the frequent defection of Russian units. The crisis of the battle was around Marasesti, and from that town will be named one of the greatest fights in Rumania's history. Mackensen was aiming at clearing Moldavia, as his colleagues had cleared Galicia and the Bukovina, and bringing the whole of what had once been the Rumanian kingdom under the yoke. The fury and persistence of the attack were matched by the resolution of the defence, and that resolution triumphed. The last great effort was made on the night of the 19th; it failed with the loss of many prisoners, and thereafter the struggle for the Sereth crossing languished, and the battle swung towards the Ocna section. There the Second Rumanian Army equalled the prowess of the First, and August closed with Mackensen far from his objectives.

The melancholy confusion of the Eastern front during these months prevented what Rumania had done from receiving its due recognition. It was in truth a splendid achievement. The small nations had a heroic record in the war, but not Belgium or Serbia had surpassed Rumania's performance. Broken in many battles against odds, she had been driven to her last defences, fighting desperately for every mile. She had seen all but a fraction of her territory seized by the enemy. She had suffered the last privations and anxieties, and she was far from the only allies in whom she trusted. Yet in spite of every difficulty she had reconstructed

her armies, assisted by General Berthelot and his French mission, and now held her ground against attacks from the flower of the Austrian and German forces. And she held it virtually alone. Tcherbachev was a brave and competent soldier, but his Fourth Army was now for the most part a rabble. In those days might have been seen a magic spectacle — Russian regiments drifting away without orders from their lines, and singing maudlin songs about liberty, while on the other side of the road wearied Rumanian troops with stern faces and contemptuous eyes marched up to take the place of the deserters. Rumania saw the enemy on the north and west and south, and to the east only the quaking bog of anarchy; but without hope of supplies or way of retreat or that comfort which comes from contact with allies, she continued to do her duty. The message sent to her by the British Prime Minister was an attempt to put into words the admiration of her far-off friends: "On the anniversary of Rumania's entry into the war, I wish to express on behalf of the British Government our heartfelt admiration for the heroic courage and endurance displayed by the Rumanian people during a year of almost unparalleled trial. The re-creation of their Army and the stubborn and invaluable resistance which it is now making against the enemy under conditions of exceptional difficulty is a magnificent example of the strength which freedom inspires in a free people. It is no less a proof of the resolution which animates all the Allied armies to prosecute the war until victory is won, a victory which I have never doubted they will ultimately achieve."

On 17th July, when the Russian offensive in Galicia was on the eve of its disastrous climax, the Bolsheviks in Petrograd, led by Lenin and Trotski, attempted to seize the reins of government. They were supported by the Kronstadt sailors and various disaffected elements in the troops. But the Petrograd Soviet was against them, and, after some indiscriminate rioting, General Polovtsov, with the help of a few Cossack regiments, restored order, and Lenin went into hiding. It was decided to disarm the insurgent workmen, and warrants were issued for the arrest of the Bolshevik leaders; but at the last moment Kerenski drew back. "They are my political opponents," he said; and the orders were countermanded. He was soon to have cause to regret his misplaced chivalry.

Kerenski had now to face two very different antagonisms. He was attacked by the growing forces of Bolshevism as a foe to the



Revolution and an enemy of the people because he had devised the offensive; and he had to satisfy the generals and the patriotic elements still left in Russia, who urged drastic reforms in the army, the restoration of the old discipline, and the retention of the country in line with the Allies. Between such opposites there could be no truce; he must cast in his lot with one or the other. He had now become Prime Minister in place of Prince Lvov, and he found it hard to form his Cabinet. The Bolsheviks were in flat opposition; the Mensheviks were coming to the conclusion that the Provisional Government was a farce destined to a speedy end, and Tseretelli resigned, preferring the soviets as a field of action. The Social Revolutionaries supported the Prime Minister, as did the Centre and the Right; and he had among his ministers types as diverse as Tchernov and Skobelov on one side, and Terestchenko on the other. It was an uneasy team, and, besides Kerenski, included but one man of real importance, the acting Minister of War, Boris Savinkov, whose strange career had embraced the parts of novelist and desperado. Something was gained for discipline by the restoration of the death penalty in the army, and by the resolution of the Executive Committee of the All-Russian Soviets in July which gave unlimited power to the Provisional Government. The soviets were at the moment in the mood for drastic action against Lenin and his friends; but Kerenski declined the opportunity thus offered. As Prime Minister, he made one final attempt to call the nation to unity; for he still believed that a formula could be found to combine irreconcilables, and that by wary shepherding the Bolsheviks and the Cadets might yet be brought into one fold. He was not prepared without a last effort of conciliation to declare any party enemies of the republic.

This effort was the conference at Moscow, which met on 26th August under the presidency of the Menshevik Nikitin, the Minister of Posts and Telegraphs. It included representatives of every known Russian organization, from the soviets to the Knights of St. George. It was a singular gathering, most instructive to the student of history, for it reflected as in a mirror the thousand crude dreams and fancies of a people loosed from the bonds of mental and moral discipline. The old *régime* had been bad enough in all conscience, but it had been a Government; the new *régime* was like the capricious play of children. Revenue by August had practically ceased; expenditure had soared amazingly, and to meet it the printing-presses could not cope with the manufacture of paper money. The issue of paper currency was in 1916 over



£29,000,000 monthly; in the months since the Revolution the average had been over eighty-three millions. The army which had gone to pieces was costing more by a thousand millions sterling per annum than the army which a year before had shattered the Austrian front on the Dniester. Russian finance had become a system of bribes and public plunder, and the salaries of the soviet partisans alone amounted to many millions. Industries were mostly at a standstill, the cultivation of the soil was neglected, and the utter breakdown of transport made famine a certainty in the coming winter. But these were not the matters which weighed most at the Moscow Conference. The bulk of its members was far more concerned with the kind of ideal polity at which the nation should aim, forgetful of the fact that they were swiftly losing all that distinguished a nation from a horde. The idealism which set out to make a new heaven and a new earth had succeeded effectually in creating a new hell.

Kerenski, faithful to his *rôle*, spoke plain words to all parties. He denounced those who would make a counter-revolution by bayonets, and he denounced those of the Left who would unwittingly achieve the same purpose by encouraging anarchy. He admitted that the main task before them was to revive the army, and he assured the soldiers present that he would protect them from Bolshevik intrigues, and would apply the death penalty ruthlessly for treachery and cowardice. After his address came the group meetings. The Duma Conference supported the Premier's views on army reform and the prosecution of the war, and urged that the Government should free itself from the internationalism of the soviets, and admit no rival authority in the direction of Russian policy. Here came the great conflict of opinion; for the various parties of the Left would admit no tampering with the soviets' power, and would have given them an equal or even superior authority to that of the Government. Then Kornilov\* arrived from the front, and addressed the second sitting. He expounded the reason of the late *débâcle*. Not the Revolution but the follies of the revolutionaries had taken the heart out of the army, and if that were not restored Russia and Russian freedom would perish at the hands of an alien tyranny. There must be discipline in the front line and no less discipline in the rear, for already the munition output had declined by 60 per cent. and the aircraft by

\* Kornilov was the son of a humble Siberian Cossack; Denikin of a conscripted serf who rose to be a non-commissioned officer. Both men were opposed to the old rule of caste and privilege.

80. When he finished his soldierly speech he walked out of the hall, the whole assembly rising to cheer him — all but the glum extremists, for whom the picture which Kornilov drew of a degraded and defeated Russia had no terrors, provided they were free to harangue and dream. Later Kaledin spoke for the Cossacks; and on the last day Alexeiev, the greatest of Russian soldiers, pointed the moral of the recent defeats. The poison had been introduced into the army by the Order No. 1 of the first days of the Revolution, which set the men against the officers and made disciplined training impossible. The whole system of army committees and commissaries was insane. Under it a general could not plan, officers could not lead, and troops would not obey. He urged the policy of Kornilov and Kaledin, and warned his hearers that every day's delay brought them nearer to utter destruction.

There were many other speeches — notably wise advice given by Plekhanov and Prince Kropotkin and Madame Breshko-Breshkovskaya, reformers who had grown grey in striving for their country's freedom — and by the morning of the 28th the Conference had talked itself to a standstill. Strangely enough, there was an apparent agreement among the great majority of the delegates on vital points — the reform of the army and the restoration of its discipline, the continuance of the war, and the reconciliation of party quarrels. But with most the first two were pious opinions, and the third was irony. The breaches had not been healed. The Left clung to the ultimate hegemony of the soviets over the Government, which the Moderates bitterly and justly opposed. Three-fourths of Russia had no inclination for the sacrifice and discipline that a continuance of war demanded. The gulf between the soldiers and the dreamers had been made visible to all, and across it straddled Kerenski, a hapless Colossus, who must soon make his election and leap to one side, or fall into the chasm.

Meantime, Germany was acting. We can best follow the history of the next two months by setting in juxtaposition according to dates the political and military happenings.

In the last week of August, the German VIII. Army under a new general, Oskar von Hutier, formerly commanding the 21st Corps, whose name was soon to become famous, began to move forward. Hindenburg and Ludendorff had already made their plans for a great offensive in the West with the aid of the troops presently to be released from the Russian front, and Hutier was instructed to test certain new tactical methods upon the *corpus vile*

of the Russian right wing. This wing, the Twelfth Army under General Parski, was too demoralized to make serious resistance. By 29th August Hutier had reached the river Aa, where it curves to follow the coast line, and was attacking at Keckau, on the Dvina, ten miles south of Riga, while German warships were threatening the entrance to the Gulf. On Saturday, 1st September, the Germans crossed the Dvina at Uexkull, eighteen miles up-stream from Riga, and by the Sunday evening had cut the Dvinsk railway and were five miles east of the Dvina, beyond the little river Jaegel. The defences of Riga were turned on the south-east, and on Monday morning Parski evacuated the city after blowing up the bridges. The same day the Germans entered, and, in spite of the heroic resistance of certain "battalions of death" on the river line, were by the evening east of the Dvina on a broad front. The Russian Twelfth Army fell back north-eastward along the coast on the road to Petrograd, and by the 5th was thirty miles from Riga, on a wavering front of sixty miles. Its left still held Friedrichstadt, west of the Dvina, but its right on the coast was in rapid retreat, and its centre was pushed up the valley of the Livonian Aa towards Venden. Alexeiev was sent post-haste to deal with the situation, and he was able to steady the retreat, and form a kind of front. But he could not save Friedrichstadt, and Hutier widened the breach at his leisure, taking Jacobstadt on the 23rd, the bridge-head on the Dvina seventy miles up-stream from Riga. The Germans did not press their attack with any haste, for they discerned with accuracy what was about to happen in Russia. It was not their business to waste good troops and ammunition in forcing a door which would speedily be thrown open.

So far from sobering the doctrinaires, the loss of Riga seemed to make them reckless. But it solemnized Kerenski, and for a moment swung him out of his detachment to seek an alliance with the soldiers. On 5th September he sent Savinkov, the acting Minister of War, to see Kornilov at Mogilev. What happened thereafter is still obscure in some of its details, but the main events are clear. Savinkov warned the Commander-in-Chief that the Bolsheviks were threatening a rising in Petrograd within the week, and asked him to arrange to send a cavalry corps to the neighbourhood of the capital, which cavalry corps was to be for the protection and at the disposal of the Provisional Government. He appears to have stipulated — though the evidence is not perfectly clear — that the so-called "savage" division\* of cavalry should

\* It was a division formed from the Circassian tribesmen.



not be included, as it was insufficiently disciplined for service in or near the capital, and that General Krymov should not be in command. On the 7th, Savinkov left General Headquarters, and Vladimir Lvov arrived, also purporting to come from Kerenski. To him Kornilov presently admitted that he thought a dictatorship necessary, but that he did not care who was dictator—himself, Kaledin, Alexeiev, or Kerenski. Lvov, speaking, as Kornilov thought, for the Prime Minister, declared that Kornilov should be the dictator. Next day Kornilov in all good faith drew up a plan for a Council of National Defence, with himself as President and Kerenski as Vice-President. Then he spoke to Kerenski on the telephone, and realized that either Lvov had exceeded his commission or the Prime Minister had changed his mind. The latter agreed to come to Mogilev on the 9th; but on that day Kornilov received a peremptory order to hand over his command to General Lukomski and come to Petrograd, while at the same time he heard that Lvov had been arrested. Then followed another message appointing Klembovski Commander-in-Chief; but neither he nor Lukomski would take up the post, and Kornilov remained Generalissimo. Krymov, with the 3rd Cavalry Corps, was already moving towards Petrograd, in defiance of Savinkov's conditions. On 10th September the Government suddenly proclaimed Kornilov traitor.

The latter was in a complete quandary. He understood that, with the Germans pouring across the Dvina on the road to Petrograd, Kerenski had accepted his view of the measures required. He took the proposals of Savinkov and Lvov at their face value, and obeyed them as orders from the Government. As for the stipulation about Krymov, there seems to have been a grave misunderstanding, and it is certain that there were forces working behind him, forces of which he knew nothing, which laboured to create such misunderstandings. When he received the confusing messages of the 8th, 9th, and 10th he conceived it his duty to disregard them, knowing that Hutier would not wait on the vacillations of civilian statesmen. Accordingly he allowed Krymov to continue his advance to Petrograd. It is less easy to explain Kerenski's conduct. Probably he had not fully made up his mind when he dispatched Savinkov to Mogilev; he had toyed with the idea of crushing Bolshevism by force of arms, but at the last moment his courage failed him. Lvov had played the part of a busybody and a fool, if not of a conscious mischief-maker, and the mistake about Krymov was in itself good ground for suspicion. It is im-



possible to believe that Kerenski purposely set a trap for the Commander-in-Chief, though there were many in his immediate circle who were working to that end. He had never been on good terms with Kornilov, and he suddenly awoke to the fact that he was about to entrust the future of his country to one whom many parties — and apparently with justice — labelled a reactionary. He therefore flung himself into the arms of the soviets, who discovered that in this matter the Bolsheviks were their allies. He proclaimed himself Commander-in-Chief, and put himself at the head of the Petrograd troops. Red Guards were hurriedly enlisted, and the unfortunate Krymov found his communications cut in the rear. He found, too, no signs of the stand which he had been told the Government meant to make against the Bolsheviks; rather he found the Government and the Bolsheviks making common cause. Presently the soviet emissaries came out under Tchernov to meet his cavalry, and informed them that Kornilov had been declared a traitor and that those who stood by him were betraying the Revolution. Krymov, trapped and bewildered, saw his honour lost, and died by his own hand.

It remained to dispose of Kornilov, that unconscious "traitor." Alexeiev was summoned to help in the task. Kornilov loyally handed over his command, and, with his headquarters staff, was placed under arrest. Then followed a campaign of calumny against all the generals. Kaledin, the *hetman* of the Cossacks, was accused of complicity in Kornilov's movement, and summoned to stand his trial; but this his Cossacks forbade, and the affair ended in an apology from the Government. There was much talk of counter-revolutionary plots, but nothing was proved, and Gourko, who had been arrested, was released and allowed to go abroad. The full tale of the episode will in all likelihood never be unravelled; but it is clear that, partly by accident, partly by the malice of third parties, two honourable men were brought into a false antagonism. Kerenski resolved on a certain course, and asked for Kornilov's assistance; certain acts of Kornilov, done in all innocence, alarmed him, he lost his nerve and drew back, while Kornilov continued to obey his first instructions. The Prime Minister's change of mind may be explained and even defended, but it was none the less a fatal disaster, for the one hope of Russia lay in Kornilov's immediate advance on Petrograd.

This affair drove the few remaining moderates out of the Cabinet. A new Council of Five was instituted — consisting of Kerenski, Terestchenko, General Verkhovski, Admiral Varderevski, and Niki-

tin—and Russia was proclaimed a republic. The condition of the capital went from bad to worse; the retreating Russian armies gave themselves over to the shameless work of pillaging their own countrymen; the sailors of the Baltic fleet murdered their officers; and in the press of Kronstadt—the worst nest of anarchy—Lenin lifted up his voice afresh. Meantime Hutier, biding his time, was slowly pressing his easy victory. On 12th October he brought the German fleet into play against the mutinous Russian war-ships.\* A large force was landed on the island of Oesel, in the Gulf of Riga, not eighty miles from the Russian naval base of Reval. By the 18th Mohn and Dago islands had been occupied with little trouble. The Germans entered by the Irben channel south of Oesel, and cut off the Russian retreat through Mohn Sound by a detachment which entered by Siele Sound and Kassar Bay. It was the very place where, in August 1915, Admiral Kannin had destroyed the German squadron which sought to land at Pernau. This success gave the enemy uninterrupted communications with the port of Riga and the command of the Livonian coast, so that they threatened the right rear of the retreating Twelfth Army. Reval was in instant danger, and on the 21st the Germans landed on the Esthonian coast east of Mohn Island. The sword was now hanging over Petrograd itself.

In the capital constitution-making went merrily on. In the early days of October a so-called Democratic Conference was held, consisting of 230 delegates from the soviets, 300 from the municipalities, 200 from the zemstvos, 120 from the co-operative societies, 100 from the trade unions, 83 from the armies, and 35 from the Cossacks. It was agreed to form a new Coalition Ministry, and to provide a provisional parliament, to be called the Council of the Republic, pending the calling of a Constituent Assembly. The new Cabinet included four Cadets and a number of Moscow business men; and on 20th October it faced its parliament, the Council of the Republic. The proceedings were not harmonious. Alexeiev reported gloomily on the state of the army, and Kerenski's only expedient was to co-ordinate the General Staff, the soviet commissaries, and the regimental committees in one organization—such a debating society as had played into Cromwell's hands at Dunbar or had handicapped Marlborough in his Flanders campaigns. He attacked with violent denunciation the Bolsheviks,

\* According to Ludendorff, one of the reasons for using the fleet was to counteract the revolutionary propaganda which was now spreading throughout the German Navy.—*My War Memories* (English trans.), II., p. 506.

who had been his allies against Kornilov. It was his last performance as Prime Minister, for the power had already gone from him. A few days later he sent a message to America that Russia was worn out, and that the Allies must shoulder the burden of the war. He was himself worn out, and during the last months had been falling into that disease of "grandeur" which is the sure presage of disaster. He lived royally in the Winter Palace; he moved about attended by a glittering naval and military staff; he conducted himself with the *hauteur* of a monarch by divine right. The dark forces waiting in the shadows observed the portent, and decided that their hour had come. They had failed in the July Revolution, for the time was not ripe; they had postponed their September attempt, since Kerenski and Kornilov had played their game; they were now ready to shatter a régime which they knew had no foundation.

If Lenin was the Mazzini of the Bolshevik party, Trotski was its Garibaldi, and now at the age of forty he saw the chance for which he had long waited, and had the courage to take it. Lacking the pure, cold fervour of Lenin, he was that formidable combination, a fanatic in ideals but a *politique* in methods; a man of action, adroit in seizing occasion, swift in deed, unscrupulous to the last degree in the weapons he used, but always conscious that he lived in a complex world, and ready to trim, intrigue, and compromise if the short road were barred. He began by capturing the Petrograd Soviet, of which he was now President. He then set to work to prepare a kind of General Staff, called the Military Revolutionary Committee, which co-operated with the Bolshevik elements in the Army and Navy and the industrial communities. He saw that the Army, which had defeated him in July, was now moribund; he saw that the moderates and the *bourgeoisie* were without cohesion. He observed that Kerenski had no party at his back, and that the apathy and despair of Russia made her an easy prey to even a small body who were armed and resolute. His first business was to make that body dictators; his second to conclude peace with an enemy who would gladly be released for their heavy task in the West; his third to summon the proletariat of all nations to do what had been done in Russia. His creed, one of the stalest and oldest in the world, has in every generation appeared somewhere for a brief season, only to perish by its own weakness. But in this case it had such a field as history had never shown before. In the weary and bewildered circles of Russian statecraft Trotski appeared like a leopard among kine.



On Monday, 5th November, the Military Revolutionary Committee ordered the Petrograd garrison to place itself under their instructions. Kerenski replied by suppressing the chief Bolshevik paper, and summoning the loyal troops to defend the Government. On Tuesday, 6th November, while Parliament by a majority of twenty-one was passing a vote of confidence in the Provisional Government, the military cadets, or "Junkers," occupied the bridges, stations, and telegraph offices, and put a cordon round Kerenski's residence, the Winter Palace. On Wednesday Lenin arrived, and the Bolsheviks made their headquarters at the Smolny Institute, a girls' school in the suburbs, whence they issued a proclamation announcing the fall of the Government and the transfer of power to the soviets. Some few regiments declared for Kerenski, but the majority went over to Trotsky; while the Cossacks, mindful of the insult to Kaledin, sulked in their tents. Hourly the Red Guards grew in number, sailors arrived from Kronstadt, and Trotsky ordered the occupation of all stations and strategic points. Early on the morning of Wednesday, the 7th, Kerenski had fled, leaving the Winter Palace in charge of Konovalov, his Minister of Commerce, with a garrison of "Junkers" and women. That day the Red Guards captured the palace, committing many brutalities on the helpless women and boys, and by the evening the whole of Petrograd was in Bolshevik hands. In the evening, at a meeting of the Petrograd Soviet, Trotsky and Lenin announced the success of the new revolution, and an All-Russia Congress of Soviets, meeting on the following day, ratified the decision. The government of the country was placed in the hands of a body called the Council of People's Commissaries, with Lenin as President, Trotsky Minister of Foreign Affairs, and a half-insane lieutenant, Krilenko, Commander-in-Chief of the remnants of the army.

The new Government, as an oligarchy acting in the interests of a narrow class, proceeded to confiscate all lands not belonging to the proletariat, and to negotiate for an armistice with the enemy. It had, at any rate, the courage of its folly. Its military strength was of the slightest, and a couple of disciplined brigades could have overthrown it, but such were not at Kerenski's disposal. He collected, indeed, a few squadrons of Cossacks under General Krasnov, which occupied Tsarskoe Selo; but, desirous of preventing bloodshed, he insisted on delivering orations, and presently the Red Guards scattered his buckram army. He had been a shadow in power, and now like a shade he disappeared, no man knew



whither and few men troubled to inquire. Russia had lost all interest in the whirligig of politics. While the Red Guards were battering at the door of the Winter Palace, the people of Petrograd went callously about their ordinary avocations, the trams were running as usual, and in the chief theatre a large audience was being entertained by M. Chaliapin.

So fell one of the most curious figures of the war. The character of Alexander Kerenski was clear to all men in its foibles and futilities; but while the world could see his failure, it could not judge the crushing difficulties of his task. He had the defects of his qualities; for something febrile weakened his imaginative power, and sudden bursts of petulance impaired the vigour of his courage. His chief defect was Hamlet's; he saw too far around his problems to have the single heart which is easy to the narrow vision. He discerned the faults of all parties, and — what was more fatal — he discerned the merits. He aimed at the impossible, the reconciliation of the Russian people in a new purpose. He did not succeed; that he should have tried is proof of his lack of practical talent and of his immense egotism; but let us admit that in his folly there was an element of sad nobility. It is by no means clear that even if he had been less tolerant and less cross-bench in mind, if he had flung in his lot with the moderates or the soldiers before it was too late, he could have saved his country. There was no weapon left in Russia for a statesman to fight with. Army, Cossacks, Cadets, peasants, *intelligentsia*, all broke in the hand of him who used them. The fates had decreed that no tinkering or welding could save the fabric. Russia must go into the furnace to be cast anew.

## CHAPTER LXXXVI

### CAPORETTO AND THE PIAVE

*October 16, 1917—January 28, 1918*

The New German Plan—Changes on the Isonzo Front—The Turin Riots—Otto von Below's Attack—The Break at Caporetto—The Austrians re-enter Gorizia—Retreat of the Italian Third Army—The Line of the Tagliamento—The Line of the Livenza—The Piave—The Conference of Rapallo—The Defence of the Piave—The Winter Fighting—The Consequences of the Caporetto Disaster.

DURING the summer months on the Eastern front, when the Russian line had ceased to be a serious obstacle, the Germans, contrary to the expectations of many, did not advance. They abode quietly in their old positions, waiting upon events. But they were not idle. Ludendorff saw clearly the chances involved in the downfall of Russia, and he set himself patiently to train his troops for a new kind of warfare. Picked divisions were practised in open fighting. A new tactical scheme was evolved which demanded a high perfection of discipline and individual stamina. The Allies in the West had relied in their offensive on an elaborate artillery preparation, which, while it destroyed the enemy trenches, created a broad belt of devastation over which a swift advance was impossible. That was one error to be avoided. A second was the slowness with which the Allies brought up their reserves. In order to get the full cumulative effect of a blow, division must follow division to strike while the iron was hot. Again, the element of surprise must be recovered, and this might be got by a rapid assembly on the very eve of an assault, before the enemy's intelligence service could discern the concentration. It was also necessary to have the machine guns, the light trench mortars, and the field guns in the very van of an attack to prepare the way for the infantry; and since an elaborate bombardment was foregone the enemy's hinterland must be confused by an extensive use of gas shells. Since the Western front became stationary after

First Ypres, Germany had been concerned chiefly with defensive tactics, for her victories in Russia, Serbia, and Rumania were won against a foe conspicuously inferior in equipment and training. In the West she had shown remarkable mental elasticity in devising plans to frustrate the Allied assault, such as the defence in depth, the "pill-box," and the use of local counter-attacks. But now a Western offensive of her own was in prospect, and she must adjust her tactics to fit her special problem, and get the full value out of such assets as she possessed. The Allied methods from Neuve Chapelle to Third Ypres had depended upon a predominance in artillery and numbers; she had not the first, and she would have the second only for a month or two. Her tactics, therefore, must be less in the nature of a bludgeon, and must provide for a more rapid and decisive success than the slow Allied attrition. So with commendable energy she faced the problem, and found what she believed to be a solution. During the summer months the East formed one vast training camp, where patiently and methodically Ludendorff taught his new system of war. His aim was no less than to destroy by cataclysmic battles first the armies of Italy, and then those of France and Britain, before the American forces arrived, and while Russia was helpless in anarchy.

Brussilov's abortive Galician offensive in July made scarcely a break in the plan. By the beginning of September the new tactics were tried in the fields in Hutier's capture of Riga. Unfortunately for the Allies, there was no one present with Parski's defeated Russian Twelfth Army who could realize the importance of the new methods. It was assumed in the West that the Russians were effete as a fighting force, and that anything possessed of discipline was competent to break them. Meantime, Ludendorff was making ready for the first great test of his plan. Krafft von Delmensingen, Duke Albrecht's chief of staff in Lorraine, was sent to the Isonzo to prepare a plan, which was accepted by Austrian Headquarters. Some time in August Otto von Below was brought from the command of the German VI. Army in the West, his place being taken by Quast, and given charge of a new composite army, the XIV., composed of six German and seven Austrian divisions. In the German contingent was included the two divisions of the *Alpenkorps*, which had already distinguished themselves in Rumania. Half of the field artillery was replaced by mountain guns, and the whole army was equipped not only for the practice of the new tactics, but for a campaign in a hilly country. Rumours of something of the kind reached the West; but

the German share was unknown, and it was assumed to be only the Austrian preparation for the long-rumoured offensive in the Trentino. More important, the German General Staff took over the actual direction of the Italian front. The shadowy figures of the Austrian army commanders still remained; but the new strategy was wholly in Ludendorff's hands. On Boroévitch's right, between Tolmino and Plezzo, Otto von Below's XIV. Army crept quietly into position. The Austrian General Staff had hitherto thought of an offensive as possible only from some base like Gorizia or the Trentino, where they had good road and rail communications behind them. Ludendorff, with the boldness of true military genius, resolved to surprise his opponents by attacking from one of the most apparently unpromising sections of the whole Julian front — that between Tolmino and Plezzo. There, he argued, he might catch Cadorna asleep. There, too, the Italian front was ill-sited, zigzagging as it did across the Isonzo, and stretching in a dangerous arc along the crest of Monte Nero. The three spots where the valley broadened — Plezzo, Caporetto, and Tolmino — were also spots where tributary valleys entered from the east, thus providing avenues for the assault. There, too, lay the chance for a decisive strategical gain. For across the river, beyond Monte Matajur and Monte Globocac, the valleys of the Natisone and the Judrio ran direct to the Friulian plain far in rear of the Italian lines. If by a swift surprise Below could reach Cividale and Udine, he might cut off the bulk of the Italian Second Army and the whole of the Third, and achieve a mightier Sedan.

The Central Powers left nothing to chance. For months they had been sowing tares in Italian fields. A secret campaign was conducted throughout Italy, which preached that peace might be had for the asking, and urged Italian socialists to throw down their arms and fraternize with their brothers from beyond the mountains. If Austria attacked, it was said, it was only to enforce the views of the Vatican and establish the brotherhood of the proletariat; let her advance be met with white flags and open arms, and the reign of capitalism and militarism would be over. This appeal, insidiously directed both to the ignorant Catholic peasantry and to the extreme socialists of the cities, worked havoc with the Italian *moral*. Orlando, the Minister of the Interior, was averse from repressive measures, and enemy propaganda had for the moment almost as clear a field as in the Russia of the Revolution. The poison had infected certain parts of the army to an extent of which the military authorities were wholly ignorant.



The events of August in Turin did not open their eyes. Turin had always been the centre of the wilder kind of socialism; it was the one city of Italy which responded to the declaration of war in May 1915 with a general strike; and during the summer the roving delegates of the Russian soviets had there been given an openly political welcome. As one of the chief munition centres its state of feeling had a direct influence on the conduct of the war. In August serious riots broke out, ostensibly on account of the scarcity of bread. There was reason to believe that this scarcity had been secretly organized, for even after it had been relieved the trouble continued. There was evidence of a widespread anarchist system, liberally financed with enemy money, and during the riots hobbledehoyes were found dead in the streets with large sums in their pockets. There was something like mutiny, too, among the troops allotted to quell the disorder, and regiments had to be brought in from other districts. Turin, as a consequence, was placed within the war zone, in order that martial law might be enforced in case of trouble. The exemption from military service of many of the munition workers was cancelled, and they were formed into battalions, which, instead of being used on lines of communication, were dispatched to the Julian front, and by a singular mischance were placed in the ominous sector between Plezzo and Tolmino.

At the beginning of October the Italian front was quiet. The Fifth Army, under General Morroni, lay on the west side of the Trentino, and Pecori-Giraldi's First Army on the east side as far as the Brenta. De Robilant's Fourth Army held the Cadore and Carnic front; Capello's Second Army, now very weary, held the Isonzo north of Gorizia; and the Duke of Aosta's Third Army lay from Gorizia to the Adriatic. The Second Army, which defended sixty-three miles of front, had only two weak corps, the 4th and the 27th, on the twenty-seven miles between Tolmino and Monte Rombon.\* A sense of uneasiness was abroad, generated partly by the knowledge of the High Command that some kind of Austrian offensive was maturing, and partly by the expectation of the extremists and pacifists, nourished on enemy propaganda, that the hour was approaching when the proletariat would take the reins and Italian and Austrian soldiers would make peace in defiance of generals and cabinets. In the middle of October there was

\* Taking the Italians from the sea northwards, in the first eight miles there were eleven battalions to the kilometre; in the next seven miles (Gorizia), six battalions; in the next fifteen miles (Bainsizza), eight battalions; and in the next fifteen (Caporetto), only two.

a small action in Cadore, in which for the first time the presence of German troops was established. Hitherto Germans and Italians had never met, except in Macedonia, and the news increased the popular anxiety, though Cadorna assured the country that the Julian front was perfectly safe. By the 21st it was known that both German and Austrian reserves had arrived on the Isonzo; but scepticism still prevailed as to a serious offensive. It was believed, even by the High Command, that Austria was morally and economically exhausted, and that Germany's slowness to advance in Russia was due to weakness and not to purpose. Nothing was suspected of Ludendorff's patient summer preparations.

The *malaise* of anxiety was reflected in Parliament, which met on 16th October. The Government was strongly criticized both by the extreme Socialists and the patriotic Opposition, chiefly on the ground of domestic mismanagement. Boselli was too old, and had no policy; and, when he was confronted with a difficulty, merely created a new minister — such was the burden of a complaint not unfamiliar also in Britain and France. Nitti, the Neapolitan professor, spoke on the 21st; and, while trenchant in his criticism, defended Orlando, and appealed eloquently for national unity. On the 23rd Orlando made a speech which established his parliamentary position, and made certain his succession to the premiership. While strongly for the war, his respect for Parliament and his devotion to the liberty of the individual made him acceptable to the Giolittians and the neutralists. Sonnino spoke on the 25th, and dealt vigorously with pacificism, and notably with the Vatican Peace Note. On the 26th the Boselli Government fell, with general consent. It had been too much of a party compromise and not enough of an efficient machine. Yet it did not so much fall as re-form itself, the chief figures remaining in different posts, since at such a crisis the country could not suffer any proved talent to be out of office. For on the 24th that had happened which had made the *Osservatore Romano* to lie down with the *Idea Nazionale*, and had called every true son of Italy to the defence of her crumbling frontiers.

The Italian lines on the middle Isonzo dropped from the Bainsizza to the right bank north of Auzza, and continued, on that shore to a point north of Tolmino. There they crossed, ran along the crest of Monte Nero, covering Caporetto, and recrossed where the Isonzo bent sharply eastward south of Plezzo. Thence on the right bank they ran to the west of the high peak of Monte Rombon. North of Rombon lay the Austrian X. Army under Krobatin;

south lay Otto von Below, whose force was disposed in four groups of assault : Krauss's group, mainly Austro-Hungarian, from Monte Rombon to Monte Nero ; Stein's to Tolmino ; Berrer's to the Idria ; and Scotti's thence to Lom. The Caporetto section was a large bridgehead on the left bank of the river, held by the Italians to guard the road and railway approaches to the valley of the Natisone, which led to Cividale and Udine and the Friulian plain. The place was peculiarly vulnerable, for it could be attacked either from Plezzo or Tolmino, from up or from down the Isonzo, and the lines on Monte Nero were too remote to protect the deep valley below. For several days the enemy guns had been firing ranging shots, and on the night of the 23rd a heavy bombardment, principally with gas shells, had broken out on the twenty-five mile front between Monte Rombon and Auzza. Cadorna was now apprised of what was coming, and his morning *communiqué* of the 24th was a warning to his countrymen. "The enemy," it ran, "with the help of German troops and military units of all kinds, has completed a very heavy concentration against our front. The enemy offensive finds us firm and prepared." Capello, commanding the Second Army, had been on sick leave from the 19th to the 22nd.

Dawn broke on the 24th in thick mist and driving rain, which on the higher hills changed to snow. For a little the guns ceased on both sides, and then in the early forenoon the Austrian bombardment opened violently on the chosen sector. It was the weather which Below desired, for it gave him the chance of surprise. The infantry were hurled against the whole front from Rombon to the south end of the Bainsizza. On the left and the right the line held, but in the centre, from Saga to Auzza, the first Italian position was carried, and in the afternoon the enemy was across the river attacking the reserve lines. It was now clear that there were three main threats — one from Plezzo up the glen towards Monte Maggiore, at the mouth of which lay the village of Saga ; one from his bridgehead at Tolmino against Monte Globocac and the upper streams of the Judrio ; and one aimed at Caporetto and Monte Matajur and the Starasella pass, leading to the valley of the Natisone. By the evening the enemy was on the slopes west of the Isonzo. The Austrian attack at Saga was gallantly held, and the progress westward from the Tolmino bridgehead was stubbornly resisted. But it was otherwise at Caporetto. The attack from Tolmino turned up the valley, and joined the pressure downstream from the direction of Saga, so that the 4th Corps was taken in reverse. There Below's German 12th Divi-



sion was in action ; and there, too, were found treachery and folly in the Italian ranks. There were strange tales of men running out with white flags to greet their Teuton "comrades," and being shot down or made prisoners. There were tales of troops in reserve who refused to advance. The comradeship which the unhappy recreants found was an imprisonment which for nine out of ten was to mean death by starvation. Treason in this case was most grimly punished.

All through the 25th the struggle went on, and on the morning of the 26th the Italian line from Monte Maggiore to Auzza was back on or behind the frontier crest. The Bainsizza plateau had been lost ; it had taken twenty days of hard fighting to capture it, and in twelve hours it had gone. Cadorna had moved his headquarters from Udine to Padua. In the great *débâcle* there were many superb feats of heroism, such as that of the Alpini on Monte Nero, who held out for several days and died almost to a man, and the troops on Monte Globocac, who defended successfully the gate of the Judrio till it had ceased to matter. But the two corps in the Caporetto section had melted away, and through the breach Below was pouring his men over Monte Matajur. So complete had been the breakdown that that summit fell at 7 a.m. on the morning of the 25th, twenty-three hours after the attack began.

On the 27th the avalanche increased its speed. It was no question now of holding the frontier ridge ; the only hope was the Tagliamento, the Piave, or it might be the Adige. Already over 60,000 prisoners had been lost, and some hundreds of guns. That day saw the end of the defence on the Maggiore-Matajur ridge. Next day, the 28th, Cadorna's grave *communiqué* brought home the truth to the Italian people. It was censored before publication, for, as he wrote it originally, he did not speak of insufficient resistance but of naked treason. The crisis was such as the war had scarcely shown — a calamity sudden, unlooked for, and overwhelming. On that day, the 28th, Below debouched from the Natisone valley on the Friulian plain. The burning ruins of Cividale were in his hands, and Udine was at his mercy. The Second Army, weary with the autumn offensive, weakened with discontent and treason, and shattered by the impact of the new tactics, had become a fugitive rabble. That day, and not an hour too soon, the Third Army on the Carso began its desperate task of retreat. That evening the Austrians re-entered Gorizia.

Such was the rout of Caporetto, the greatest disaster suffered



in so short a time by any combatant in the campaign. The responsibility for it must rest mainly with Cadorna and the High Command; the responsibility both for the actual break between Saga and Tolmino, and for the later *dégringolade* which brought the enemy to the Piave. The Second Army had been heavily tried in the recent fighting, and was a force which in its then condition was capable of a normal winter defensive, but no more. Cadorna had given up all thought of a further advance that autumn; but he had already brought up his batteries for it, and his guns were dangerously far forward for defence. He realized early in October that an enemy offensive was coming, and coming almost certainly in the Rombon-Tolmino sector, and he hesitated whether to meet it by a retreat or to hold his existing front. He finally decided for the latter, but took no steps to ensure that the front would stand, though that piece of line was obviously the most precariously sited in his whole Isonzo area. These facts reveal a strange confusion and improvidence. The endangered front was held by two weak corps, into which the malcontents of Turin had been drafted, and this at a time when pacificism was in the air, and every intelligent field officer was pointing out its insidious growth among the troops. There was no real reserve. There was no *liaison* between the 4th Corps and the troops on its left and right. Behind them the old Friulian defence system had been discarded, and the forts on the Tagliamento dismantled; but there were twelve prepared alternate lines between the Isonzo and Udine, good lines which might have been held had the problem of retirement ever been worked out by Cadorna and his staff, and proper instructions issued to the subordinate commands. There were other and graver derelictions. The Commander-in-Chief's methods were too often like a bad copy of Prussianism; no effort had been made to counteract the inevitable war-weariness, to relieve the intolerable tedium of trench life, or to improve the inadequate ration scale. The Italian High Command were fully informed both as to the impaired *moral* of some of the troops and the weariness of all, and as to the intentions of the enemy, but either in their isolation they did not realize the gravity of the news or in their supineness they were too slow to take the necessary measures. Some incident like Caporetto was inevitable sooner or later in an army which was constituted like the Italian and had endured so fierce an ordeal; that the breach was not repaired but spread into a general dissolution was due in some degree to the merits of the new German tactics, in some degree to unavoidable misfortune, like the

weather, but mainly to the lethargy and blindness of the High Command.\*

The situation was the gravest that Italy had met since she entered the war — the gravest, save for the tremendous days of the Marne and the crisis of First Ypres, which the Allies had yet witnessed in the West. Capello's command had been broken in pieces, and was no longer an army. Streaming back in wild disorder to the Friulian plain, it uncovered the Duke of Aosta's flank, and seemed to imprison him between the invaders and the Adriatic. The suspicion that treachery had in some degree contributed to the disaster was like to make the retreat more difficult, for such news spreads like a fever among troops and saps their resolution. The huge salient had broken at the apex, and every mile of retirement on the east meant a complex withdrawal on the north. Upon forces wearied with a long campaign descended in a black accumulation every element of peril which had threatened Italy since she first drew the sword.

The spirit of the nation rose gallantly to the call of danger. The grim *communiqué* of the 28th brought down many a politician's castle of cards. On 27th October the king had arrived in Rome, and on 1st November the new Ministry was announced, with Orlando as Premier, Sonnino at the Foreign Office, the young Neapolitan Nitti at the Treasury, and Alfieri as Minister of War. More important than Cabinet changes was the unanimity of the people. All — almost all — sections of the nation and the press faced the crisis with a splendid fortitude. Party quarrels were forgotten, there was little recrimination for past blunders, and the resolution of a united Italy was braced to meet the storm. Only a few extremists, to whom the disaster was not unwelcome, stood aloof, and their organ, the *Avanti*, continued to preach the arid follies of the class war.

The strain was increased by ignorance as to what forces were sweeping down on the northern plain from the Isonzo hills. Rumour spoke of twenty, thirty, forty German divisions under Mackensen marching through the gap, and the legend grew with every lip that uttered it. Even the High Command was in perplexity, and put the enemy at a far higher figure than the facts warranted. Otto von Below had only his six German divisions, and could not hope for reinforcements yet awhile. It was Italy's salvation that the enemy was as much surprised as herself. He had made an

\* Cadorna's most interesting *apologia* will be found in his *La Guerra alla fronte Italiana*, 2 vols., 1921.

experiment which he hoped would return to Austria her old western boundaries ; it had in fact opened the way to Milan ; but he was not prepared for such a miracle of fortune. Had he been ready to strike from the Trentino against the Italian First Army, and from Carnia against the Fourth, while Below and Boroévitch pressed in the Second and Third, he might have annihilated the military power of Italy. Broken at the point of her salient, she could not in these terrible days have resisted even a moderate offensive on her northern flank, and the line of the Adige might have been turned before Cadorna's rearguards reached the Tagliamento. But Ludendorff had not made the plan for so wholesale a conquest ; that came later, but when it came the golden opportunity had gone.

On Saturday, 27th October, Below was in Cividale ; the Third Army, after a fine rearguard action in the Vallone, had retired from the Carso, and Boroévitch was in Gorizia. Next day Below was on the edge of Udine, the little city with its cathedral-crowned height and its narrow, arcaded streets which mounts guard over the Friulian plain. The gravest problem was the position of the Third Army. When it began to fall back from the Carso, it was no nearer the Tagliamento than the spearhead of the enemy, and the Tagliamento was the first halting-place for Cadorna's retreat. The Second Army had gone, and by Sunday the enemy had 100,000 prisoners from it, and 700 of its guns. For a moment it seemed certain that the Duke of Aosta would share the fate of Capello. A million of men were retreating along the western highways, encumbered with batteries and hospitals and transport, while by every choked route peasants and townsmen fled for refuge from the Austrian cavalry. Units lost discipline, orders miscarried, roads were blocked for hours, and all the while down from the north came the menace of Below, swooping southward to cut off all retreat. There had been nothing like it before in the campaign, not even in the Russian *débâcle* of 1915, for then there had been great open spaces to move in. In the gut of Friulia, between the foothills and the sea, a mass of humanity was struggling westward, soldiers and civilians mingled inextricably. There could be no attempt at traffic control, but it was tacitly understood that no one moved for half the night while horses and drivers slept. Here and there was blind panic ; here and there troops, mostly young recruits, made bitter gibes about Trieste, and thanked God for the end of the war ; but the majority toiled steadily and silently. Under leaden skies and pouring rain they pressed feverishly on, for it was a race against time if they were not to find the Taglia-



mento held by the enemy. And from the country they were leaving, now lit up with the glow of bursting shells and blazing villages, came horrible tales of rapine and outrage by the Austrian vanguards. If ever panic was to be forgiven it was on those nightmare miles where troops were set a task too high for human valour.

But to its eternal glory the Third Army did not fail. With heavy losses, and by the narrowest margin, it won the race. There were two roads of retreat, each attended by a railway — that from Udine to Pordenone, which crosses the Tagliamento by the long bridge of Codroipo first built by Napoleon, and that from Monfalcone to Portogruaro, with a bridge at Latisana. There were many byroads and lesser bridges, but these were the only highways for heavy traffic. For three days — from 28th October to 30th October — a curtain of darkness seemed to descend on the Italian stage. There were no claims from the enemy, no clear news from Cadorna. On the 28th the Austrians were in Cormons; on the 29th the Germans were in Udine. On the 30th remnants of the Second Army were crossing the river at Codroipo, and a kind of defensive flank had been established facing north to cover the vital crossing of Latisana. Next day the bulk of the Third Army crossed, sacrificing its rear divisions and 500 guns; and on the first day of November the Duke of Aosta was in position on the western bank, with the river roaring in flood between him and his pursuers. For a moment there was a pause, while the enemy, who had outstripped his heavy batteries, waited on their arrival. The race had been won, but it was a shattered remnant of Cadorna's armies which drew breath after their week of torment. The enemy claimed 200,000 prisoners and 1,800 guns, and his claim was not far from the truth. He seemed on the eve of a decisive victory.

The Third Army's retreat was one of those performances in war which succeed against crazy odds, and which, consequently, we call inexplicable. It made an Italian stand possible, and deprived the enemy of the crowning triumph which he almost held in his hands. Only the disorganization of Boroévitch's army, which had no speed or method in its pursuit, permitted the Duke of Aosta to snatch safety out of apparently certain disaster. How desperate was the struggle may be judged from what we know of the retirement of the naval batteries on the coast flank. There were such batteries at Monfalcone, at Punta Sdobba, and at the point of Grado; and when, on the 28th, the Third Army's retire-



ment began, there seemed nothing to prevent the Austrian fleet from issuing from Pola and landing on the Venetian shore in rear of the retreat. For only light naval forces watched the coast, and the main Allied Navy was at Taranto, 600 miles away. The rain fell in sheets, and a wind from these drove up the tide so that the canals overflowed and flooded the marshes. After thirty-six hours of heavy toil the guns were got out of Monfalcone, but not before the rearguard of Italian marines was exchanging rifle shots with the Austrian van. The guns were dragged through the swamps, or placed on rafts and poled through the shallows amid the rising storm. Grado was reached and presently evacuated, and with the enemy pressing on their heels, the marines succeeded in making their way through the labyrinth of the coastal lagoons till they reached the Piave mouth, and became the pillar of the right wing of the new front. But the greatest glory of all was won by the cavalry, troops like the Novara Lancers and the Genoa Dragoons, some of the finest horsemen in Europe, who again and again charged the enemy and sacrificed themselves with cheerfulness that the retreat might win half an hour's respite. Said one colonel to his officers: "The *canaille* have betrayed our country's honour; now we, the gentlemen of Italy, will save it," and wheeled his squadrons into the jaws of death.

The Tagliamento was clearly no line to abide on. It was less a river than a torrent; in seasons of flood a mile wide, but for most of the year a tangle of shallow channels flowing among wastes of pebbles. The bed of the stream, silted up with gravel brought down from the hills, was a score of feet above the level of the surrounding country. At the moment it was in flood, but by 1st November the rain had stopped and the stream was falling, so it opposed but a slender obstacle to the enemy. Moreover, it could be easily turned on the north, and in the main railway through the Pontebba pass the Austrians had the means to their hand for such an operation. Cadorna could halt for a day or two to re-form, but he dare not linger. If the Tagliamento were given up, there was no good line till the Adige was reached, some sixty miles to the west. But to retire to the Adige would be to uncover Venice. The importance of that famous city was more than sentimental. It was the key to the Adriatic, the key to the whole of Italy's defence. With Venice in the enemy's hands, the Italian warships would have been compelled to fall back four or five hundred miles to a base at Brindisi. Austria would have controlled the northern Adriatic, and her fleet could no longer be shut up in

Pola and inside the Dalmatian islands. She would be able to send her submarines in large numbers out into the Mediterranean and dislocate the Allied naval commerce with the East. She would have a free hand to harry the coasts of Italy. With Venice gone, Italy's right flank was unprotected, for in truth her front did not stop short with the shore line. The Adige was therefore out of the question, and by hook or by crook a halting-place must be found which kept Venice inside her country's battle line. To this problem there could be only one answer. The stand must be on the Piave.

It was not a front which a general would select had he any choice. The river rises among the fantastic Dolomite peaks, and flows south in a narrow mountain vale till at Belluno it turns to the south-west and emerges from the hills. In the forty miles of its mountain course it is no serious obstacle to any enemy. At Belluno it has become a considerable stream, and, after a wide bend through the leaf-shaped hollow towards Feltre, the foothills close in on it at the pass of Quero. It has now something of the character of the Tagliamento, a broad bed where many branches strain through gravel, between embankments to keep the floods from the lower levels of the surrounding country. It then bends to the south-east, past the bridge of Vidor, where Napoleon and Massena crossed in 1797, and flows through the gap between the Asolo hills and the wooded Montello. From Nervesa for the remaining twenty-five miles to the sea it is a better defence — short, straight, and protected by the Montello on one flank, and the sea marshes on the other. The Piave is a strong line only towards its mouth, a weak and difficult line in the centre, and no line at all in its upper glens.\* Carnia and Cadore must be relinquished, and the Fourth Army brought back from those peaks and gorges, which it had won with such boldness and resolution through two arduous years, to hold a front from the Montello by the *massif* of Monte Grappa and across the Val Sugana to link up with the First Army in its old position on the Asiago plateau. While, therefore, the Duke of Aosta was struggling westward from the Tagliamento, de Robilant had fallen back from Cadore, and was moving with all haste towards the middle Piave.

\* Once before in history Austria had invaded Italy by way of Caporetto. This was in 1809, when the French, under Eugène Beauharnais, were forced by the Archduke Johann as far west as the Adige, though Napoleon hoped that they would stand on the Piave. The latter's victory at Eckmühl relieved the situation, and sent the Archduke back over the frontier. Napoleon's correspondence of 1808 and 1809 contains appreciations of the strategic value of Caporetto, the Tagliamento, the Livenza, and the Piave, drawn from his recollections of the campaign of 1797.

On Saturday, 3rd November, a German and a Hungarian division from Below's army forced the passage of the Tagliamento at Pinzano, where the river leaves the foothills, thereby cutting off the Italian troops and guns on the line between Tolmezzo and Gemona. Cadorna still held on to the middle and lower river, and on the 4th repulsed an enemy attempt to cross near San Vito. But Below's vanguards were already moving west along the edge of the hills, and on Tuesday, the 7th, the Tagliamento line was abandoned. The next stage was the Livenza — the old Liguentia — a deep, pellucid stream, but too narrow to retard the enemy. The pursuit was close and persistent, and already on the 6th the enemy cavalry were in action at Sacile, where the Treviso-Udine railway crosses the upper Livenza. The Italian line was now bent back heavily on its left, and, while the main force was still on the Livenza, the left wing was back on the upper Monticano, which enters the Livenza at Motta. The Motta crossing was held long enough to get the guns of the centre away, and on the 8th the Livenza was abandoned. By the 10th Cadorna was everywhere back on the Piave, and the retreat had ended.

It had been conducted wholly by Italian troops, and the credit was Italy's alone. But the first news of the break at Caporetto had brought her Allies to her aid. On 26th October the French and British Governments agreed to reinforce Italy each with five divisions from the Western front. On the 30th the British Chief of the Imperial General Staff was at Treviso with Cadorna. Before the end of October French divisions were crossing the frontier, and a French force, the 12th Corps, under General Fayolle, was preparing to take its place on the Italian front. A British contingent, the 14th Corps, under Sir Herbert Plumer, the commander of the Second Army, had come into being by 10th November. In the first days of November Mr. Lloyd George left London for Italy, with General Smuts, Sir William Robertson, and Sir Henry Wilson. They were joined in Paris by the Premier, M. Painlevé — who on 12th September had succeeded M. Ribot — and General Foch; and on Monday, 5th November, at the village of Rapallo, sixteen miles from Genoa, they met Orlando, Sonnino, and Alfieri. That conference was one of the most fruitful of the war. Out of it sprang the Allied Council at Versailles, which we shall consider later, and, indeed, the whole movement for a unified Western command. It settled the assistance which France and Britain were to give to their hard-pressed neighbour, and it resulted in vital changes in the Italian High Command



Cadorna was transferred to Versailles, and his place as Commander-in-Chief taken by the Neapolitan General Diaz, who had led with brilliant success the 23rd Corps in the Carso battles. General Badoglio became his Chief of the General Staff.

But the Allied reinforcements could not come into line at once, though the certainty of them simplified the problem and eased the mind of Italy as to her reserves, and the defence of the Piave for some weeks must be maintained by her alone. It was still uncertain whether the line was a possible one, and it was at first arranged that the British and French should take up ground on the hills north and south of Vicenza, in case it should be necessary to retire behind the Brenta. That the notion of any such retirement was presently given up was due partly to the sound strategical wisdom and resolution of General Plumer, and largely to the spirit of Orlando's Ministry, who refused to contemplate a withdrawal to the Adige or the Mincio, which would have involved the surrender of some of the most famous of Italian cities.

The critical point on the Piave was the Montello height, which was, so to speak, a hinge between the northern front facing the hills and the river front covering Venice. If the Montello went, the bridge which carried the Treviso-Udine railway would go, and so would the crossing at the Vidor gap to the north. But on the whole front the most crucial point was the mass of Monte Grappa between the Piave and the Brenta. If it were carried, the enemy could debouch from the Brenta valley and turn the flank of the Piave defence. It was the threat from the north which occupied the mind of the new Commander-in-Chief, for the most gallant stand on the river line would be futile if the enemy broke down from the northern hills to the low country around Bassano. He had already begun to move in this direction. On 9th November, when the last of the Duke of Aosta's rearguards were fording the Piave, and when de Robilant's Fourth Army was hastening through Belluno, pressure began in the Val Sugana and on the Asiago plateau, and the remains of the village of Asiago fell once again into Austrian hands.

On the 11th de Robilant was in position from the Montello to the Brenta, and the Austrians, pushing down the upper Piave, past Feltre, had linked hands with their troops in the Val Sugana. The rain had begun again, and the soldiers on the Piave looking northward saw the high hills white with snow. It was a spectacle to cheer the soul of the High Command, for it lessened the risk



of that break out from the mountains which was their worst peril. The forces were now set for the culminating struggle — Pecori-Giraldi's First Army facing Scheuchensteuel's Austrian XI. Army on the Asiago plateau, de Robilant's Fourth Army facing Krobatin's Austrian X. Army and part of Below's XIV. Army from the Brenta to the Montello, the Duke of Aosta from the Montello to the sea opposed by Below and Boroévitch. Clearly de Robilant had far too long a front for a single army, and to hold it boys of seventeen and eighteen were brought up from the depots and the garrisons, often after only a month's training. In the moment of their country's agony they flung themselves into the desperate breach. With a rhetoric which the greatness of the occasion justified and ennobled, d'Annunzio summoned these young levies of Italy to defend the Piave as the last bulwark of their land.

"Are there in Italy other living rivers? I will not think of them. . . . Soldiers of the countryside, soldiers of the city, men of every kind, Italians from every province, forget all else for the moment, and remember only that *this* water is for us the water of life, regenerative like that of baptism. Is there a torrent within hearing of your home? It is of this water. Is your farm bordered by a rivulet? It is of this water. Is there in your market-place a fountain playing? It is of this water. It runs beside the walls and past the doors, and through the streets of all the cities of Italy; it runs past the threshold of all our dwellings; it safeguards from the destroyer all our altars and all our hearths. Only with this water shall you quench the thirst of your womenfolk, your sons, your old people. Failing it, they must perish, and their end must be desolation. Do you understand? This river — which figures as a hero in the legends of Venice, which to-day stands heroic in the veneration of all Italians, this Piave — this river is the vital vein of our existence, the deep artery of the blood of our land. If it is pierced, our hearts must cease to beat."

It was not till 4th December that Plumer and Fayolle took over the Montello sector facing Below, and so permitted de Robilant to concentrate on the Grappa.

The points of danger, as we have seen, were the northern flank, between Asiago and the Piave, and the gate of the Montello; but from some cause or other the enemy did not concentrate all his efforts there. The lure of Venice made him strike also direct against the lower Piave, where the Italian defences were by nature the strongest. One reason for this may be found in the character of his communications. In the plains they were excellent, but in

the hills he had but the one railway down the upper Adige valley, and the roads he had built for the 1916 attack were now deep in snow. Nevertheless, the attempt offered superb strategic prospects. The wall of the Alps above the plain of Bassano is cut clean as with a knife. It runs in a scarp at an average height of some 5,000 feet, broken only by the trough of the Brenta. Behind it rises a second tier, which, west of the Brenta, forms the rim of the Asiago plateau. To understand the position it is necessary to keep this formation in mind. The Italian front occupied the edge of the second tier east and west of the Brenta, with the Grappa *massif* and Monte Tomba well inside their lines. If the enemy could force his way to the edge of the first tier, he commanded the plains and had turned the Piave.

On the night of Sunday, 11th November, the Austrians attacked Monte Longaro, north-east of Asiago, but were held by the Alpini. Next day, after a heavy barrage, Boroévitch's forces succeeded in crossing the Piave at the Zenson bend, eighteen miles from the sea — the first bridgehead on the western bank secured by the enemy. On the 13th Longaro had fallen, and the fighting was at Monte Sisemol, a peak east of Asiago, on the very edge of the second tier. That day, too, no less than four attempts were made to cross the lower Piave, at Quero, Fenere, St. Dona, and Intestadura, while Hungarian battalions crossed the canalized stream at Grisolera, and made their way through the marshes to the old channel, the Vecchia Piave. On Wednesday, the 14th, the Italian left was firm on the edge of the second tier, across the peak of Castelgomberto to Cismon, in the Brenta valley, but east it was forced by the loss of Monte Tomatico to descend to the first tier just above the Piave. Next day the pressure in the hills became stronger, and Cismon was lost.

On Friday, the 16th, Boroévitch made a vigorous attempt to cross the Piave. He tried at two points, Folina and Fogare, north of where the Treviso line crossed the river at the Ponte di Piave, failing conspicuously at the first, but winning a bridgehead at the second. That same day the Austrians had a success in the hills, carrying Monte Prassolan, east of the Brenta. They had greatly strengthened their troops in this area, and on Sunday, the 18th, had won Quero, on the Piave, and forced part of the Italian front off the second tier of upland on to the first. It was now on Monte Tomba, on the very edge of the plains. The position was that on the lower Piave the enemy held two bridgeheads, but had not elbow-room to develop them; while in the hills he was held on

the second tier west of the Brenta, but had fought his way to the front tier at one point between that stream and the Piave. For the moment this little section of twelve miles was the critical part of the battle.

The rest of November saw a desperate struggle from Asiago to the Piave, especially in the Monte Grappa quarter. Elsewhere little happened, for the natural difficulty of the lower Piave line, the stout resistance of the Italian marines in the marshes, and the constant shelling from monitors off the coast, made a crossing in force a forlorn enterprise for the enemy. But it was otherwise in the mountains, where, in spite of the snow, he made a resolute effort to reach the last rim of upland which would give him a decisive success. The struggle was carried on mainly by Austrian mountain troops and Hungarian divisions, and Below's Germans played small part in it. Blow after blow was delivered, alternately east and west of the Brenta, blows which were gallantly parried, though the weary Italian lines had slowly to give ground. In the first week of December it was clear that a great effort was maturing on the Asiago plateau, where, against a front of less than twelve miles, some 2,000 guns of all calibres were concentrated.

The attack was launched, after a furious bombardment, on 5th December, two Austrian forces moving from the north-west and the north-east against the salient at Asiago, which had its apex at Castelgomberto. It succeeded in driving Pecori-Giraldi altogether off the second tier of hills back to the first tier; but he still held Valstagna in the Brenta valley, and all but the top of the little Val Frenzela, which descends to it from the west. The enemy claimed 15,000 prisoners, for gallant companies of Alpini had held out on the lost peaks of Castelgomberto and Sisemol long after the line had retired. A week later, after a still greater massing of artillery, Krobatin attacked between the Brenta and the Piave. His aim was to win the debouchment of the Brenta valley by carrying the hills on the eastern side, and especially the passes of Caprile and Barretta, and the peak called Asolone, south of the latter. He struck on the 12th, and for three days the battle lasted; but by Saturday, the 15th, he had achieved little beyond reaching the summit of the Caprile pass. This did, indeed, give him a certain advantage by facilitating his movement of troops in the Brenta valley. On the 18th he succeeded in securing most of Monte Asolone, and farther east he held the lower of the two summits of Monte Tomba. This gave him positions outflanking Monte Grappa, and the possession of Asolone further endangered



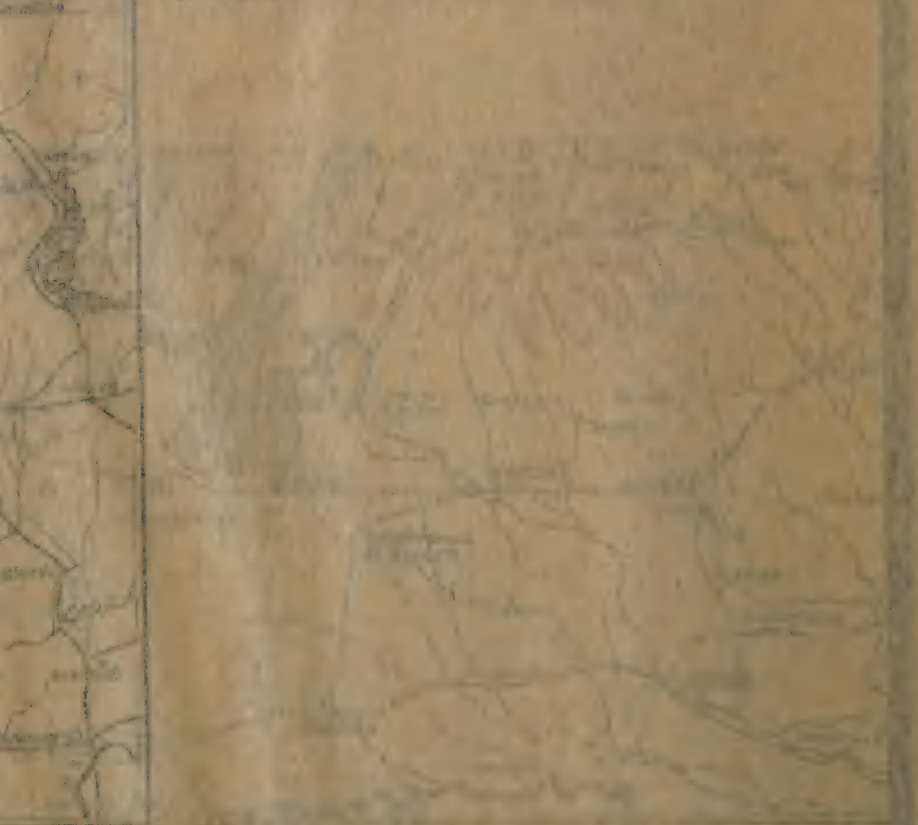
THE ITALIAN RETREAT TO THE PIAVE.  
(Facing p. 64.)





THE ITALIAN RETREAT TO THE PLAVE

(1918-1919)



Valstagna on the Brenta. He was endeavouring to advance down the Val Sugana by taking forward steps alternately on each side of it.

On 22nd December the Italians counter-attacked at Monte Asolone, and recovered all its south slopes. On the 23rd they had to face another dangerous thrust south of Asiago to the left of the Frenzela glen, where the enemy took Monte di Val Bella, the Col del Rosso, and Monte Melago, which brought him nearer to the rim of the heights. A counter-attack recovered the last point, but on Christmas Day the position was still anxious. On both sides of the Brenta the enemy was getting terribly near the plains. Before the close of the year, however, the situation was eased. The French left had been moved west of the Piave to assist de Robilant in the Grappa region, and on 30th December, supported by British batteries, it attacked the eastern shoulder of Monte Tomba, and won it, together with over a thousand prisoners.

With the new year the prospect steadily brightened. The wild weather in the hills handicapped the enemy effort, and gradually the German divisions were removed, since, in the view of Ludendorff, a decision could no longer be hoped for, and he had need of them elsewhere. The long front of the Piave was quiet, with a swollen stream running at a speed of sixteen miles an hour before it. In the British section there were many adventurous raids, and in the first days of January 1918 the Duke of Aosta cleared the Austrians from the bridgehead at Zenson. On 14th January de Robilant made a successful attack on Monte Asolone, and before the end of the month Plumer had extended his right so as to ease the Third Army in its task. On 28th January Pecori-Giraldi attacked the Col del Rosso and Monte di Val Bella, and took 2,500 prisoners. With this episode the campaign which began at Caporetto may be said to have reached its close. It had taken heavy toll of Italy's strength, but it had failed to show that decisive victory which for some weeks had seemed inevitable. The German High Command had turned its mind from Austria and her troubles to a greater plan in a more vital field, and Conrad von Hoetzendorff and Boroevitch were left once more to their own devices.

The retreat to the Piave had various direct and calculable results. It shook to its foundations Italy's military strength, and deprived her in a single month of some 800,000 effectives\* and

\* The official estimate was, in round figures, 10,000 dead, 30,000 wounded, 265,000 prisoners, 350,000 missing and deserters, and 150,000 sick.

great stocks of war material which could with difficulty be replaced. It gave famished Austria certain immediate supplies from the conquered lands, and fanned once again into a modest flame her flickering belligerent zeal. It proved to the German High Command the merit of their new tactics, and encouraged them to try them in a greater venture. All these were solid assets for the Central Powers. Yet in a real sense the disaster brought more gain than loss to the Allies. It welded Italy into a closer Union, and roused that ancient and untameable spirit which was one of her legacies from Rome. It compelled reforms in her commands, and it forced her Government to give its attention to the "civil front," which had been weakened from neglect and treason. The splendid work of the American Red Cross, which began after Caporetto, was a practical proof of Allied goodwill, and did much to ease the lot of the soldiers' families; while the spectacle of French and British divisions on the Piave brought home for the first time to many Italians the magnitude of the alliance in which they were joined. More, her sudden success laid bare the true heart of Germany, and compelled all but the grossest self-deceivers among the Allies to realize the hollowness of the alleged German conversion to democracy, discredited what was left of Kuhlmann's "peace atmosphere," and forced a recognition of the fundamental conflict of creeds between the antagonists—a recognition which the events of the next six months were to put beyond the sphere of doubt. Most of all, Caporetto and its sequel brought to an end the old isolation of each Western ally. The problem, both military and economic, was now seen to be single and indivisible; and, though months were to elapse before the machinery was perfected and a yet bitterer lesson in the fruits of disunion was to be learned, it is from the Conference of Rapallo that we can date the true change of heart. Thenceforward, in theory at any rate, there was but one front between the North Sea and the Adriatic, a single exchequer and a single granary.

## CHAPTER LXXXVII

### THE MESOPOTAMIAN SITUATION AND THE FALL OF JERUSALEM

*April-December 11, 1917*

The Summer of 1917 in Mesopotamia — The Capture of Ramadie and Tekrit — Death of Sir Stanley Maude — Allenby's Problem in Palestine — Capture of Beersheba — Fall of Gaza — Capture of Jaffa — Advance into the Judæan Hills — Allenby enters Jerusalem.

At the close of April 1917 the Turkish 13th and 18th Corps had been driven back on divergent lines, the position at Bagdad was secure, and the growing heats of a Mesopotamian summer brought campaigning for the time being to an end. Leaving sufficient troops to guard the positions won, Sir Stanley Maude withdrew the bulk of his forces into reserve, distributing them in camps along the Tigris banks, where they might have the benefit of the occasional river breezes. The health of the army was excellent; supplies and transport had been brought to a high pitch of perfection; it was possible to arrange for extensive leave to India; and the four months' inaction was employed in resting and reorganizing the men who had fought the Bagdad campaign and in making plans for the autumn.

As the weeks passed it became probable that the advent of the cooler weather might bring with it a serious enemy offensive. The demoralization of Russia was affecting the whole Eastern front. Much of it was already fluid, and Russia's weakness in Transcaucasia meant the opening of the gate for Turk and German into Central Asia, and the fanning of the flames of disorder through the length and breadth of Persia. Moreover, it appeared that Germany was not minded to let Mesopotamia slip from the control of the Central Powers. Falkenhayn was at Aleppo forming the new Yildirim army group, and his first object was the recovery of Bagdad. The brilliance of his recent successes did not conceal from Sir Stanley



Maude the fact that his strategical position was not an easy one. He was nearly seven hundred miles up the Tigris from the sea. On his right flank he had the uncertain factor of Persia ; in front an entrenched enemy drawing reinforcements from Mosul by the Tigris valley ; and on his left the Euphrates valley, with its caravan route to Aleppo. Happily, the jealous desert circumscribed the area of conflict, and therefore the area of surprise. But, in view of the unplumbed possibilities of disaster inherent in the Russian situation, it behoved the British commander to set his house most warily in order.

The summer was not without its minor incidents. Early in June Baratov found that his Russian contingent on the Diala could not endure the heat of that sandy triangle, and fell back over the passes beyond Karind towards Kermanshah. This event forced Maude to reoccupy Beled Ruz on the canal which enters the Diala at Mansuriya. More important was the position on the Euphrates, where, after our occupation of Feludja on 19th March, the Turkish garrison had retired twenty-five miles upstream to Ramadie. The town lies on the right shore of the river, and the Turkish commander, Ahmed Bey, occupied an entrenched position covering it on the east and south-east with a force of something over 1,000 Turkish bayonets and 2,000 Arab tribesmen. Our position at Feludja was not a happy one, for the advance to Samara on the Tigris meant that our centre had been pushed forward far in advance of our flanks. It was accordingly decided to bring up our left wing ; and with this object, on 8th July, we occupied the high ground known as Sinn el Zibban, on the left bank of the Euphrates, some twelve miles beyond Feludja, where the Saklawie Canal, coming from the Akkar Kuf lake at Bagdad, enters the river.

There, on the 10th, the column assembled for the attack on Ramadie. The Turks were unprepared, and they left unoccupied the high ground of Mushaid, four miles east of Ramadie, which was the true key of its defence. By 4 a.m. on the 11th our column was in touch with the enemy, and by 8.15 that morning had driven in his advanced posts. But the main attack could not be delivered. A blinding dust storm sprang up, observation became impossible, and that night the British withdrew to Mushaid, where there was a little shelter. Next day it was clear that an abnormal heat wave was beginning, and the column waited only long enough to make certain that Ahmed Bey did not meditate a retreat, before falling back to Sinn el Zibban on the 14th. A mob of Arab tribesmen

who ventured to follow was severely cut up by our light-armoured motor batteries.

In August there was another small operation. Our line had been drawn in on the Diala, and the retreat of Baratov had emboldened the enemy. He was pressing south-west of Shahraban, which we no longer held, and it became necessary to check him by reoccupying the place. On the night of the 18th a column moved from Bakuba up the great Persian road, and another from Beled Ruz along the canal. On the 20th Shahraban was taken with little opposition, the enemy retiring to his old fastness of the Jebel Hamrin.

With September came cooler weather, and plans were matured for the attack on Ramadie. Ahmed Bey had now been considerably reinforced, and he no longer neglected the Mushaid ridge, which runs north and south on the right bank of the Euphrates some sixty feet above the plain. It was a strong position, for its right was protected by the Habbaniyeh lake, a large, brackish pan which British engineers, working there in 1914, had designed as a storage reservoir for the flood water of the river. Three miles behind the Mushaid heights lay the Turkish main position, running in a semi-circle around Ramadie, first along the eastern bank of the canal between the Euphrates and the Habbaniyeh lake, and then along some sandy downs to the Aziziyeh Canal, which leaves the river a mile west of Ramadie. Sir Stanley Maude's plan was to turn the southern end of the Mushaid ridge, cross the Habbaniyeh Canal, and make his principal assault upon Ramadie from the south, while his cavalry, moving west of the Aziziyeh Canal, flung themselves across the Aleppo road, and blocked the Turkish communications with Hit. He so distributed his troops as to suggest that his main attack would be upon the enemy's left on the Euphrates, and for this purpose he had the river bridged at Madhij and a road made up the left bank. The British starting-point was Madhij, some eight miles from the Turkish outposts. At six o'clock on the evening of 27th September two infantry columns and a cavalry force moved out for five miles, and the infantry during the night advanced a further two miles, while a detachment skirted the northern shore of the Habbaniyeh lake, and succeeded in turning the southern flank of the Mushaid ridge. At dawn the enemy, seeing what had happened, evacuated Mushaid, which he shelled heavily in the belief that the British had occupied it. Maude, however, was moving south of the ridge, and at 7 a.m. dispatched the cavalry in a wide sweeping movement to the south and west. They crossed the

Habbaniyeh Canal, kept well south of Ramadie, crossed the Aziziyeh Canal, and were presently to the west of the town astride the Aleppo road.

The British were now in position, and their left attacked the Turkish southern front, which held a low pebbly ridge some seventeen feet above the plain. The enemy was driven off the ridge after hard fighting, but at the same time the right column, which had been passed in rear of the left column, was securing ground on the Aziziyeh ridge, south-west of the town. The position at nightfall was that the enemy was hemmed in on all sides except on the north, where ran the Euphrates; but over the Euphrates he had no bridge. His only chance was to break through by a counter-attack before the net was drawn tight. At three o'clock on the morning of the 29th Ahmed Bey made his effort to escape. He tried the cavalry screen on the west. The fight lasted till dawn, but the Turks never got within fifty yards of the cavalry trenches. At 6.15 a.m. the British infantry attacked again on the south and south-east, and drove the enemy from the ridge. The 39th Garhwalis, at 7.30, had seized the bridge where the Aleppo road crosses the Aziziyeh Canal, and about the same hour the 90th Punjabis entered Ramadie. The cavalry on the west, expecting another attack, saw Turkish masses approaching, and to their amazement observed white flags fluttering in their ranks. By 11 a.m. the whole enemy force had surrendered, including the commander Ahmed Bey, who had been fighting on the Euphrates since the start of the campaign.

Ramadie was a perfect example of an encircling operation carried out with dash and precision. It was the only important action on the Euphrates since Nasiriyeh in July 1915, and it yielded the largest number of prisoners of any single battle so far won by the British in Mesopotamia. Our captures included 3,454 Turks, of whom 145 were officers, 13 guns, 12 machine guns, 2 armed launches, 2 barges, and large quantities of arms and stores.

So much for the left of the British front. On the day on which Ramadie was fought the right wing pushed out from Beled Ruz, and occupied Mendeli, capturing 300 baggage camels and driving the Turkish garrison eastward into the hills. The Turks had used the place as a supply station, and it was of some strategical importance, since it was linked by a mountain path with Harunabad on the Persian trunk road, and was therefore a possible base for a flank attack. During October Sir Stanley Maude continued to improve this side of his position. Between 18th and 20th October



he drove the enemy from the Diala into the Jebel Hamrin, and occupied the frontier town of Kizil Robat. The Turkish 13th Corps was forced to retreat towards Kifri, and the British flanks were clear for a fresh advance up the Tigris.

The Turkish 18th Corps lay entrenched at Tekrit. On 23rd October columns from that corps moved down both banks of the river, approaching Samara, but fell back on the appearance of British troops. On 2nd November our advance guard found the enemy in position on the left bank of the river, opposite a place called Dur, twenty miles above Samara. After a short engagement the Turks fell back upon Tekrit, the birthplace of Saladin the Great, a town some forty miles from Samara, and the main advanced base of the Turkish Army of Mesopotamia. On Monday, 5th November, we came in touch with the strong enemy position there. At our first attack we carried the first two lines of trenches, and beat off a counter-attack, while our cavalry worked round the enemy's right flank, and our guns from across the river shelled his communications with the north. In the afternoon we attacked again, and the cavalry on our left charged into the trenches and cut down many of the retreating Turks. That evening the enemy blew up his dumps, set fire to his stores, and retreated at his best speed, and on the morning of 6th November we occupied Tekrit.

Maude was now only some hundred miles from Mosul; but the river beyond Tekrit was full of rapids, so that water transport was not possible in a further advance. His next step must therefore be to clear the new Turkish advanced posts of Kifri and Kirkuk, seventy miles east of Tekrit. Here a much used road to Mosul, traversing the foothills of the Persian border, ran eastward of the swampy region where the northern spurs of the Jebel Hamrin flank the marshes of the Shatt-el-Adhaim. His victories had given him a strong position from the point of view both of supplies and of strategy, for the enemy had no good advanced bases from which Falkenhayn could launch his promised counter-stroke. Whatever might be coming from Aleppo, the British commander could await it with some confidence; and if nothing came, the British occupation of enemy soil was growing stronger day by day. Indeed by mid-October Allenby's threat in Palestine had convinced the German Staff that the recovery of Bagdad was impossible unless the British were driven back to the Sinai desert, and so far from reinforcements arriving on the Tigris men and guns were being withdrawn from Irak. The road to Mosul was all but open.



But Maude was not destined to reap the full fruit of that which he had so wisely sown. On the evening of Sunday, 18th November, he died suddenly of cholera, the result of drinking a cup of native milk which his courtesy forbade him to refuse. His death was a heavy blow to the Army of Mesopotamia and to the British cause. In little more than a year he had sprung into fame, and his reputation was the most valuable which a commander can acquire — that of one who did not blunder, whose heart never failed him, who was as patient and methodical in conceiving a plan as he was swift in executing it, who cared most zealously for the welfare of his men. Success followed his banner because he had taken pains to ensure it. His personal character was simple and kindly, and he was both loved and trusted by all who worked with him. These have happily been the characteristics of many British generals, and Maude was the type of soldier which it is the peculiar glory of his nation to produce. He was so modest and unrhctorical that it was only the tragic shortness of his career that made the world realize its brilliance. He had taken over the Army of Mesopotamia at a time when it was dispirited by failure and distraught by mismanagement. He had made it one of the best organized and most efficient of British forces, and in the face of immense difficulties he had led it continually to victory. Indeed the operations at Sanna-i-yat and Shumran in February 1917 must rank with Allenby's turning movement on Esdraelon in the following year as the most perfect British achievements in manœuvre battles during the campaign. If we would realize the magnitude of the war, let us compare the popular reputation which attended his success with that which he would have won had the campaign on the Tigris been the only military enterprise of Britain. He had done more than Wolseley had done in the course of a long life; and Kut and Bagdad were far greater achievements than Omdurman. Had he fought his battles twenty years earlier he would have had the prestige in the popular mind which fell to Roberts and Kitchener; but so vast was now the scale of British operations that he ranked with the British people as only one of many capable commanders.

The problem in Palestine was not unlike that in Mesopotamia. Much had been won, but as yet neither security nor any decisive success; and Falkenhayn was at Aleppo with orders to restore to Turkey her lost territory. If the British did not advance, they would certainly not be permitted to remain where they were.

Two facts, however, simplified Sir Edmund Allenby's task as compared with that of Sir Stanley Maude. He had a safer position both to defend and to advance from, for the railway from Egypt was close at his heels, and his left flank was guarded by the sea, where British warships could operate. Again, he had before him a tangible and practicable objective. Mosul was far from Bagdad, and its capture would have complicated rather than relieved Maude's position, since it would have been all but impossible to hold it. But Jerusalem was near; if won, there was no reason why it should not be retained; and its capture would resound throughout the inhabited earth. Its military value might be small, but the moral value of its occupation was incalculable. Every consideration urged Sir Edmund Allenby to press on towards the cradle city of Christendom.

He had taken over from Sir Archibald Murray the command of the Egyptian Expeditionary Force at the end of June, and had increased it to the seven infantry and three mounted divisions which he estimated as his requirements, by the completion of the 75th Division and the bringing of the 10th and 60th Divisions from Salonika. His first business was to reconnoitre. The enemy positions lay from Beersheba north-west to the sea at Gaza, along the higher ground north of the Wadi Ghuzze, a front of some thirty miles. Gaza and its neighbouring villages had been converted into a strong fortress, and the rest of the line was a series of groups of fortified redoubts — at Khirbet Sihan, at Atawineh, at Hareira, and at Beersheba itself, the groups being on an average a little over a mile apart, save that four and a half miles intervened between Beersheba and Hareira. The British front was in close touch with the Turks at Gaza, but in the centre and on the right was separated from them by some miles of waterless desert. The enemy had greatly strengthened his defences since the spring battles. He had built branch lines running west from the Central Palestine Railway to Deir Sined, north of Gaza, which gave him good lateral communications; and he had so elaborated and connected his strong points that his front was now practically continuous between his two flanking fortresses. The Turkish defences which faced Allenby were many times more formidable than the loose and scattered lines against which Murray had moved in March. But there were certain weaknesses. The demands for the reinforcements necessary to hold Beersheba were refused till too late because of the projected Bagdad expedition; and the Turks believed that Allenby's plan was for a landing on the coast behind their right

flank, with the result that the chief defensive work was done in the Gaza sector and the main reserves concentrated there.\*

A frontal attack on such a position was not likely to succeed; nor could the line be turned on the western flank, for there was not space to manœuvre between Gaza and the sea. But as Allenby considered the enemy front, he observed that it had certain gaps. One was between Ali Muntar and Sihan, but the most notable was that between Hareira and Beersheba. The latter town was virtually a detached and separate defensive system. If the enemy position was to be turned, it could only be on the east, on the line from Hareira to Sheria on the railway. If that enterprise were successful, the difficult ridge running south-east from Gaza would be taken in rear, and the British would be operating against an open flank. But to gain a starting-point for such a movement, the isolated fortress of Beersheba must first be mastered.

In the spring Sir Archibald Murray had considered the possibilities of this plan, and had rejected it on the ground that it would bring his communications parallel to his front. But in the meantime we had improved our line of supply, and the desert railway had been continued first to Shellal and then towards Karm, while lines were in process of construction from Gamli, the extreme point on the British right, to El Buggar, and on our left from Deir el Belah to Wadi Ghuzze. The main problem before Allenby was water and transport. There was good and abundant water at Beersheba, as also at Sheria and Hareira, but nowhere else on the immediate battleground; and there was also the danger that the enemy might destroy the wells in case of a retreat. He had, therefore, to be prepared to supply his troops with water from his own bases for a period which might amount to a week or more. Again, there were no good roads south of the line Gaza-Beersheba, so motor and wheeled transport was unreliable. Camels were the chief stand-by, and the 30,000 we possessed were all allotted to the right wing, which might have to operate twenty miles or more beyond railhead.

The first step was the capture of Beersheba, and for this Allenby proposed an encircling movement not unlike that adopted at the First Battle of Gaza. The mean little town, which seems an oasis only to the traveller whose eyes are weary of the red rocks of the Sinai desert, lies below the southern end of the *massif* of Hebron. From the hills in the east and north-east descend numerous deep-

\* Since the Second Battle of Gaza serious epidemics, due to insufficient food, had raged in the Turkish armies, so that about a quarter of their strength was continuously in hospital.



cut water-courses, dry in summer, but in winter filled with roaring torrents. Of these, the most notable is the Wadi Saba, coming down from the east, south of which, towards the El Auja railway, lies Hill 1070. Allenby proposed to attack the south and south-east defences between the Khalasa road and the Wadi Saba with the 60th (London Territorial) and 74th Divisions, while the Imperial Camel Corps and part of the 53rd Division made a holding attack north of the Wadi. The cavalry were to be sent in a wide circuit to cover the town from the east and north, and get astride the main road to Hebron. In the meantime Gaza was to be heavily bombarded both from land and sea, as if an attack were preparing in that quarter. He could not hope to move his striking force unobserved over ten miles of open country, but he hoped to persuade the enemy that the movement was only a feint, and that the real attack was against Gaza.

On 27th October the Turks made a reconnaissance in force towards Karm, cut up some yeomanry outposts which covered our railway construction, and were driven back by the arrival of the 53rd Division. That day the shelling of Gaza began, and on the 30th the bombardment was assisted by British and French warships from the sea. On the evening of the 30th the force designed for Beersheba was concentrated at its starting-point, and in the bright moonlight the march to the battle position was completed. In order to "prepare" our attack on the main defences, and to bring up field guns for wire-cutting, Hill 1070 must first be carried. After a short but very heavy bombardment this was rushed by the Londoners by 8.45 a.m. on the morning of the 31st, and the guns came into position.

At 12.15 the 60th and 74th Divisions attacked the main defences between the Wadi Saba and the Khalasa road. It was a fine performance, and with singularly few casualties the whole position had fallen by one o'clock, with the exception of a few redoubts which held out till the evening. Meantime the cavalry, after a night ride of more than thirty miles, had in the early morning reached the high ground five miles east of the town. Below them lay the open and treeless plain between Beersheba and the skirts of the hills. This ground was commanded by the hill Tel es Saba, north of the Wadi Saba, a place 1,000 feet high, which was defended on the south by the steep banks of a ravine. It was strongly held, but about 3.30 in the afternoon New Zealand and Australian horse had carried it, and were clearing up the German machine-gun posts between it and the town. An Australian brigade had been sent



north to secure the hill of Bir es Sakaty, on the Hebron road. This was accomplished by one o'clock, and escape was denied to the enemy in that quarter. All through the afternoon fighting went on in the open plain, where the main force of the cavalry, working in small bodies, was endeavouring to close in from the east. The end came just before the dark fell, when the 4th Australian Light Horse Brigade, leaping the enemy trenches, galloped into Beersheba, and the place fell. The garrison \* was put out of action, some 2,000 prisoners and thirty guns were taken, and the way was now prepared for a blow on the enemy's exposed left flank between Hareira and Sheria. Fortunately the enemy had been so taken by surprise that he had failed to destroy more than two of the Beersheba wells.

The next stage was the frontal attack on Gaza, designed as a subsidiary operation to attract the Turkish reserves to that sector. The line of attack was that which had been entrusted to the 53rd Division in the battle of 17th April. The objective was the 6,000 yards front from Sheikh Hasan on the sea, 2,500 yards north-west of Gaza, to the ridge which was called Umbrella Hill, † 2,000 yards south-west of the town. It was an ambitious objective, for there was a long space between our front lines and those of the enemy, and the sand dunes of the coast made heavy going. The first step was to take Umbrella Hill, which commanded the ground to the west, and at eleven o'clock on the night of 1st November this was carried by part of the 52nd Division of Scottish Lowland Territorials. At 3 a.m. on the morning of the 2nd, in the darkness before dawn, the main attack was delivered. It was completely successful: almost all the objectives were gained; so far from the enemy being able to reinforce his left flank, one of his reserve divisions had to be sent to Gaza; and the capture of Sheikh Hasan had given us a position outflanking the town on the west.

All was now ready for the major operations in the east; but water and transport difficulties compelled Allenby to move more slowly than he had hoped. On the morning of 1st November the 53rd Division and the Camel Corps advanced into the hills north of Beersheba, with the object of securing the flank of the main attack on the line Sheria-Hareira, while mounted troops took the Hebron road towards Dhaberiyyeh, in the hope of finding water and

\* It was mainly the 27th Division, an Arab formation, said to be the worst in the Turkish service.

† Umbrella Hill was about 500 yards north of the British position on Samson's Ridge.

securing the new motor road from Sheria. That night the 53rd held a line from Towal Abu Jerwal, six miles north of Beersheba, to four miles north-east of Abu Irgeig, on the main railway; and Abu Irgeig itself was occupied by the 10th Division. The cavalry was meantime in conflict with the enemy farther north round the hill and wadi of Khuweilfeh. As we advanced in that direction we found the Turks strongly posted, and their forces increasing. On the 4th and 5th they did their utmost to drive our flank guard back upon Beersheba; and by the evening of the 5th the best part of three Turkish divisions had been identified around Khuweilfeh, while more infantry and the bulk of the Turkish cavalry were farther north towards the Hebron road. All the available enemy reserves were allotted to Fevzi Pasha, who with the VII. Army held this front. But Allenby refused to allow the threat on his flank to divert him from his main scheme. "The country north of Beersheba," he wrote, "was exceedingly rough and hilly, and very little water was to be found there. Had the enemy succeeded in drawing considerable forces against him in that area, the result might easily have been an indecisive fight (for the terrain was very suitable to their methods of defence), and my own striking force would probably have been made too weak effectively to break the enemy's centre in the neighbourhood of Sheria-Hareira. This might have resulted in our gaining Beersheba, but failing to do more—in which case Beersheba would only have been an incubus of the most inconvenient kind." He prepared to attack at once the main position at Kauwukah and Rushdi, which covered the Sheria-Hareira line.

During the night of the 5th the troops of assault were well west of the railway, and before dawn were in position. The battle plan was for the 10th, 60th, and 74th Divisions to attack on the British left towards Kauwukah, while yeomanry advanced on the right towards Sheria. On the extreme right flank the 53rd Division was to move on Tel el Khuweilfeh. The troops attacked on the 6th at dawn, and Allenby's boldness was justified. By midday most of the objectives had been won, Kauwukah and Rushdi were taken, and Hareira entered. By the evening the yeomanry were in Sheria station; and the 53rd Division, assisted by the Camel Corps, had carried Tel el Khuweilfeh after severe fighting. Long before the dark fell the cavalry had ridden northward, with orders to occupy Huj and Jemmamah.

That night the British left moved again upon Gaza, which for the past nine days had been under a continuous bombardment.

They found little resistance. At Outpost Hill and Middlesex Hill and Ali Muntar, where in April our advance had been stayed, there was nothing but thin rearguards. The 54th Division on the left, the 52nd in the centre, the 75th on the right, together with the French and Italian detachments, had an open road before them, though Turkish batteries were still firing from Beit Hanun and Atawineh. By the evening of the 7th the 52nd Division, passing to the British left, had pushed ten miles up the coast, and seized the north bank of the Wadi Hesi, thereby preventing the enemy from making a stand on that line, while our cavalry were engaging the Turkish rearguards at Beit Hanun.

Gaza had fallen, not to assault, but to far-sighted and methodical strategy. At comparatively small cost Allenby had rolled up the Turkish line from the left, and compelled it to a general retreat. The enemy had suffered some 15,000 casualties, including the loss of over 5,000 prisoners. There were many rearguard actions. It was not till the morning of the 7th that the hill of Tel el Sheria fell, and that night the Turkish detachment which had held Atawineh made good its escape. There was a sharp encounter near Huj, where squadrons of yeomanry captured twelve guns. Our airmen, who had done invaluable work throughout the battle, reported that the enemy was in full retreat, and, if hard pressed, was too demoralized to offer much resistance. The position, in the words of the official dispatch, was, that "operations had reached the stage of a direct pursuit by as many troops as could be supplied so far in front of railhead. The problem, in fact, became one of supply rather than of manœuvre."

It was a problem sufficiently hard; for water, where it existed, was in deep wells, and the enemy had damaged the machinery, so that its supply to troops was slow and difficult. But speed was urgent, if the British were to reap the fruits of their victory. The Turkish VIII. Army, under Kress von Kressenstein, was retreating north along the Philistian plain. If Allenby could reach in good time Junction Station, where the Jerusalem line left the main railway to Damascus, he would cut off the Jerusalem garrison from its communications with the rest of the Turkish forces. The Turkish left, Fevzi's VII. Army, which had been driven back towards Hebron, hung on the wing of our advance; but, though it made several demonstrations, it was too weak to be capable of serious mischief. The Imperial Camel Corps was a sufficient flank guard in that direction. We were moving far from railhead, we had a slender force for so great an undertaking, and our problem



of supply grew more acute with every mile of advance. But we had a signal advantage in the demoralization of the enemy.

On the 9th the Lowland Scots occupied Ascalon, the ruins of that city which had been the last conquest of Richard Cœur-de-Lion, and which in its great days under the Khalifs had been called the "Bride of Syria," for the fairness of its palaces and gardens. On the 10th our line ran from Hamameh, four miles north of Ascalon, to the bend of the Central Palestine railway north-east of El Feluja. It was now apparent that the enemy resistance was stiffening, and that the dash for Junction Station would not be unresisted. Whatever in the Turkish armies could be induced to fight had been brought up to stop our progress. The enemy held the line of Wadi Sukereir, with his centre at El Kustineh, and his left at Beit Jebrin. The weather was very hot, with the scorching *khamisin* blowing from the inland deserts; our troops were thirty-five miles from their railhead; and the numerous wadis and the sandy roads made marching arduous for men who had in the past fortnight fought many battles. Still we crept on, our left on the coast moving fastest, since the roads there were better, until on the morning of 13th November we were prepared to strike for Junction Station, and the eastward wheel began. The enemy's right flank was already all but turned, and his troops lay on a front of twenty miles from El Kubeibeh to Beit Jebrin, the right half being parallel to and five miles in advance of the section of the railway between Ramleh and Junction Station. The orientation of the opposing fronts was now changing from that of west to east to that of north to south.

The attack of the 52nd Division on the 13th, assisted by a dashing yeomanry charge, drove the enemy from Katrah (Cedron) and El Mughar, with a loss of 1,100 prisoners. That night we lay a mile west of Junction Station, and next morning the place was in our hands. The main objective had been brilliantly attained, and Sir Edmund Allenby's words describe a signal achievement in open warfare: "The enemy's army had now been broken into two separate parts, which retired north and east respectively, and were reported to consist of small scattered groups rather than formed bodies of any size. In fifteen days our force had advanced sixty miles on its right and about forty on its left. It had driven a Turkish army of nine infantry divisions and one cavalry division out of a position in which it had been entrenched for six months, and had pursued it, giving battle whenever it attempted to stand, and inflicting on it losses amounting, probably, to nearly two-



thirds of the enemy's original effectives. Over 9,000 prisoners, about 80 guns, more than 100 machine guns and very large quantities of ammunition and other stores had been captured."

Jerusalem was now directly threatened, and Turk and German alike made frantic efforts to save it. Enver came from Constantinople, and departed after haranguing his defeated generals. Falkenhayn came from Aleppo, found he could do nothing, and returned to Nablus (Shechem) to watch events. Allenby continued his advance with his 21st Corps on a broad front, pivoting somewhat on his right. His first step was to seize Jaffa, and his left wing pressed along the low range called the Shephelah, the western foothills of the Judæan highlands, and the old "debateable ground between Israel and the Philistines, between the Maccabees and the Syrians, between Saladin and the Crusaders." \* There, on the 14th, at the village of Abu Shusheh — the ancient Gezer — the Turkish rearguard made a brief stand. It was driven in next morning, and mounted troops occupied Ramleh and Ludd — the latter that Lydda where St. George of England is fabled to have suffered martyrdom. Next day, the 16th, Jaffa (Joppa) was occupied without opposition.

Allenby now made a bold decision. He had originally intended to wait till the improvement of his communications enabled him to collect all his forces before turning into the Judæan hills. He now resolved to attack at once with what he had got — one mounted and two infantry divisions, leaving one infantry and one mounted division to protect his communications. He believed that the tide was with him, and he determined to take it at the flow. The enemy had been split in two, and there was no line on which he could unite nearer than the Tul Keram-Nablus position. If he had decided on that line he would probably evacuate Jerusalem. But before we could advance upon the capital certain steps must be taken. The finest troops in the world cannot march seventy miles in nine days, fighting all the way, without needing rest. Again, we had outrun our supplies, and time must be allowed for the railway behind us to be pushed forward to a reasonable distance. Finally, Allenby had to make his position secure. The west side of the Judæan uplands consists of steep, bare spurs divided by narrow valleys, and many invaders coming from the coast had found defeat and destruction in those difficult passes. For our advance we had, beside the railway, a single decent highway, that which runs from Jaffa to Jerusalem. To safeguard the

\* Sir G. A. Smith, *Historical Geography of the Holy Land*.

flank of that advance, to secure our hold upon the coastal plain, as well as to isolate the city, it was necessary to get astride the one good road which traverses the hills from south to north, the road from Jerusalem to Nablus. The advance upon the Holy City could not, therefore, be by the directest route, more especially as the British commander was anxious to avoid any fighting in its immediate vicinity. He wished to conquer it, as he had conquered Gaza, by blows struck at a distance.

The stage in the campaign which followed was one of slow and hard-won progress in a most intricate country. On the 18th, in heavy rain, the yeomanry began to move from Ramleh through the defiles of the hills towards Bireh (Beroth) by way of Beitur el Tahta (Lower Bethhoron) and the valley of Ajalon — the old route between coast and plateau where Joshua won his unorthodox victory, and where Saladin in the Third Crusade frustrated all the chivalry of the West. Next morning Beit ur el Tahta had been reached. On that day, the 19th, the advance of the infantry began by the main Jaffa road. The 75th Division was to move to Kuryat el Enab (Kirjath Jearim) with Australian mounted troops on its flank, and then strike north to Bireh by way of Biddu; while the 52nd was to advance in support through Berfilya to Beit Dukka, just south of the Ajalon valley. After some resistance in the narrow defile at Saris, Kuryat el Enab and Beit Dukka were taken on the 20th, and the yeomanry came within five miles of the Nablus-Jerusalem road.

Next day, the 21st, the 75th Division reached the ridge called Nebi Samwil (the ancient Mizpah), where stood the tomb of Samuel the Prophet. The hill was just under three miles from the Nablus road, and some five miles from Jerusalem.\* On their left the yeomanry got within two miles of the road, near the place called Beitunia. The rain, which had made our transport most difficult, had now given place to clear, cold weather, and Jerusalem, hidden in its hollow to the south-east, seemed already in our hands. Suddenly the incalculable Turk all along the front developed a new power of resistance. He counter-attacked violently at Nebi Samwil on the 22nd, and his artillery on the main road admirably supported his infantry, while ours was still far in the rear. He did not shake us; but, on the other hand, we could make no progress. On the same day the yeomanry at Beitunia were heavily assailed, and compelled to fall back to Beit ur el Foka (Upper Bethhoron). Before the road could be carried reliefs must be

\* This was the farthest point reached by King Richard in January 1192.

completed and the guns brought forward. Accordingly we secured the line Kustul-Nebi Samwil-Beit Izza-Veit Dukka-Beit ur el Tahta, and for two weeks held our hand. The 60th Division relieved the weary 75th and 52nd.

But the enemy was not inactive. From 25th November onward he made a series of attacks against our left wing — the Australian and New Zealand Mounted Division — on the coast, which at that time held the north bank of the Auja, four miles beyond Jaffa, and our advanced posts had to retire across the river. On the 29th our line was temporarily broken north-east of Jaffa; and on the 30th the yeomanry and the 52nd Division were heavily engaged between El Burj and Beit ur el Foka, while an attack was also delivered against the Nebi Samwil ridge. The enemy won no lasting success, and between the 27th and the 30th we took 750 prisoners. Meantime the fine weather allowed us to bring up our guns, develop the water supply, and improve the roads for the final advance.

The British line had now the shape of a sickle, with the centre of the curve flung far forward towards Jerusalem. It was necessary to bring up the handle, consisting of the 53rd (Welsh) Division of the 20th Corps and part of the cavalry, which had been watching Hebron and had not been seriously in action since the stubborn fight for Tel el Khuweilfeh on 6th November. Their advance began on 4th December. Hebron, the ancient city of Abraham, was occupied without opposition, and by the evening of the 6th the advance guards were ten miles north of the place. It was arranged that the line Bethlehem-Beitjala should be reached by the 7th, and that by dawn on the 8th the British right wing should be at Surbahir and Sherafat, three miles south of Jerusalem. That day was fixed for the final closing in from west and north.

On the 7th the weather broke, and three days followed of incessant rain, which interfered seriously with our already difficult transport, while the mist complicated the work of the artillery. We had won the passes, and were fighting on the uplands; but the deep valleys and rocky crests of the summit were not less arduous than the western slopes. At dawn on the 8th we attacked towards the Nablus road, and by noon the 60th Division had advanced over two miles and was wheeling north-east to gain the road, while the 74th had carried the Beit Iksa spur. But the right wing, advancing from Hebron, had taken longer than was expected; and, since the western outskirts of Jerusalem seemed strongly held, the Londoners were compelled to retire their right,





# THE CAPTURE OF JERUSALEM.

(Facing p. 82.)



# THE CAPTURE OF JERUSALEM.

(PART I.)

THE CAPTURE OF JERUSALEM.

THE CAPTURE OF JERUSALEM.

and form a defensive flank facing east. At this point they were one and a half miles west of Jerusalem.

Meantime, in the city itself all was confusion. When Falkenhayn departed for Nablus the heads of the various Churches had followed suit. Ali Fuad Pasha, the commander of the Turkish troops, issued proclamations full of the resolution to resist to the last, in one of which he made the curious claim that the Turks had held Jerusalem for thirteen hundred years. Arrests and confiscations were the order of the day, till the gun-fire on the western hills about 6th December warned the garrison that the British were at hand, and the exodus of Turkish civilians began. About midnight on the 8th the Governor, Izzet Bey, went to the telegraph office, and with his own hand smashed the instruments. Sunday, the 9th, came, the festival of the Hanukah, which commemorates the recapture of the Temple by Judas Maccabæus in 165 B.C. Long before dawn hustled detachments of Turkish soldiers began to pour in at the Jaffa Gate, while an outgoing stream flowed eastward across the valley of Jehoshaphat. The British, coming from the west, had found the enemy in retreat, and while the 60th and 74th Divisions were moving to a line across the Nablus road, four miles north of the city, the 53rd Division on the south cut the main road to Jericho. Jerusalem was isolated, and shortly after sunrise the mayor sent out a parlementaire with Izzet's letter of surrender. The last Turkish soldier straggled out of St. Stephen's Gate, and long before noon British patrols were in the city.

On Tuesday, the 11th, Sir Edmund Allenby entered Jerusalem by the Jaffa Gate, which the Arabs call "The Friend." Close by was the breach made in the walls when the German Emperor in 1898 made his foolish pilgrimage. Far different was the entry of the British general. It was a clear winter's day, and the streets and housetops were thronged with black-coated, tarbushed Syrians and Levantines, and the more picturesquely clad peasants from the near villages, and Arabs from the fringes of the desert. There was no bunting or bell-ringing or firing of salutes. On foot, accompanied only by his staff, the commanders of the French and Italian detachments, and the military attachés of France, Italy, and the United States, he was received by the Military Governor and a guard representing all the nationalities engaged in the campaign. He turned to the right into the Mount Zion quarter, and at the Citadel, at the base of the ancient Tower of David, his proclamation was read to the people.

"To the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Blessed and the people dwelling in the vicinity. The defeat inflicted upon the Turks by the troops under my command has resulted in the occupation of your city by my forces. I therefore here and now proclaim it to be under martial law, under which form of administration it will remain so long as military considerations make it necessary. However, lest any of you should be alarmed by reason of your experience at the hands of the enemy who has retired, I hereby inform you that it is my desire that every person should pursue his lawful business without fear of interruption.

"Furthermore, since your City is regarded with affection by the adherents of three of the great religions of mankind, and its soil has been consecrated by the prayers and pilgrimages of multitudes of devout people of these three religions for many centuries, therefore do I make known to you that every sacred building, monument, holy spot, shrine, traditional site, endowment, pious bequest, or customary place of prayer, of whatsoever form of the three religions, will be maintained and protected according to the existing customs and beliefs of those to whose faiths they are sacred."

Then he quietly left the city. Yet no conqueror had ever entered it with more prestige. For centuries there had been current an Arab prophecy concerning a deliverer from the West, and in 1898 the people of Palestine had asked if the Kaiser were indeed the man. They were told that such would not be the manner of his coming, for the true saviour would bear the name of a Prophet of God, and would enter Jerusalem on foot, and would not appear till the Nile flowed into Palestine. To the peasants of Judæa the prophecy now seemed to be fulfilled, for the name of the English general was in Arabic the "Prophet," \* and his men had come into the land bringing with them the waters of Egypt.

So ended the latest of the vicissitudes suffered by the most famous of the world's cities. No other had endured such changes of fortune. In the thirty-three centuries of her history she had witnessed some twenty sieges and as many more blockades and occupations. She had been the prize fought for by conquerors from the Tigris, the Nile, the Tiber, the Bosphorus, the Rhone, and the Thames. Even five hundred years before Christ the author of the Book of Lamentations could write of her: "Behold, and say if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow!" Her sanctity was as far-reaching as her trials. She was the Holy City alike to Jew and Christian and Moslem, and their devotion was less to the

\* Al Nebi.]

relics within her walls than to the compelling power of the faiths to which she had given birth, and the ideals of which she had been the battle-ground: so that dreamers of every age rebuilt her bulwarks in the heaven of their imagining, and her name became synonymous with that "shadie citie of palme-trees" which is the goal of all human endeavour. Other conquerors had seized her as prize of war or to glorify their special creed, but now she was held in trust for all creeds that did her honour. It is scarcely fantastic to see in the entry of the Allies on that December day a parable of the cause for which they fought. They would recover and make free the sacred places of the human spirit which their enemies sought to profane and enslave, and in this task they walked reverently, as on hallowed ground.



## CHAPTER LXXXVIII

### CAMBRAI

*November 6–December 7, 1917*

The New British Plan — The Tanks — Byng's Preparation — Opening of the Battle of Cambrai — The Check at Flesquières — Close of First Day — The Advance of 21st November — German Reinforcements arrive — The Fight for Bourlon — The Enemy Counter-attack — Summary of Battle — Military Position of Britain at close of 1917.

ON 6th November with the taking of Passchendaele the Third Battle of Ypres drew to a close. It had been a protracted and costly operation. On 29th October, in both Houses of Parliament, the leaders of all parties had paid grateful tribute to the exploits of the British Army. "When I read of the conditions under which they fought," said the Prime Minister, "I marvel that the delicate and sensitive instrument of the human nerves and the human mind can endure them without derangement. The campaigns of Stonewall Jackson fill us with admiration and with wonder as we read how that man of iron led his troops through the mire and swamps of Virginia; but his troops were never called upon to live for days and nights in morasses under ceaseless thunderbolts from a powerful artillery, and then march into battle through an engulfing quagmire under a hailstorm of machine-gun fire." But splendid as the record had been, the British High Command could not contemplate the situation with much comfort. Many German divisions had been broken at Ypres, but the stagnation of the winter war would give them time to rest and refit. Already large enemy forces had been brought from Russia, more were on their way, and there were many more to come. If the enemy were left in peace, he had it in his power to create a dangerous situation for the spring. Moreover, Italy, fighting desperately on the Piave, deserved by all the laws of war some relief in the shape of an Allied diversion. Weary as his troops might be, Sir Douglas Haig

was not able to grant them the rest which they had earned and most urgently required.

If another blow was to be struck, it must not be delayed. The operations at Passchendaele had compelled the Germans to concentrate heavily on the threatened front and reduce their strength in other sectors. These dispositions still continued; but presently, when it was clear that the pressure had been relaxed, their troops would be more evenly distributed. If the British could strike at once in an unexpected quarter, they might have the benefit of a real surprise, and at the moment the thoughts of the Allied Command, like that of the German General Staff, were running on some means of breaking the rigidity of trench warfare and restoring the element of the unexpected. Should such a blow succeed, it would have a real effect upon the *moral* of the enemy, for after Third Ypres he would not anticipate a fresh Allied effort yet awhile. It would give him an uneasy winter, for it would not permit him to reduce the strength of any part of his front, as had been his former practice, and so would cripple that heavy local concentration which might be looked for in the spring. In deciding the question a final consideration affected Sir Douglas Haig. The British tanks had greatly increased in number and efficiency. At Third Ypres ground and weather had prevented their effective use, and decreased their reputation in the enemy's eyes. The commander of the Fifth Army had reported on them adversely, arguing that they could not negotiate bad ground, that the ground on a battlefield would always be bad, and that consequently they were of no use on a battlefield. The major premise was doubtful and the minor false, but if all battles were like Third Ypres the conclusion would have been justified. But a terrain might be found where they could work freely, and, if so, they might form a further element of surprise.

The mind of Haig, like that of Ludendorff, was working towards the discovery of new tactics. So long as their numbers preponderated, and the future promised a growing preponderance, the Allied Command had been satisfied with those tactics which, originating at Neuve Chapelle, had received their final form at the Somme. They were the tactics of quantity, mass, patience, rather than of quality, brilliance, and speed. Of their value, granted the continuation of the circumstances of 1916, and especially the war on two fronts, there could be no question, but they tended to blunt the minds of their users, and when the fall of Russia made their success no longer certain both France and Britain were

slow to re-think the problem. Nivelle, indeed, had the inspiration, but he had not the power to develop it in accurate detail. The French Staff during the summer of 1917 made an exact study, witnessed by a hundred able memoranda, of the German method of defence in depth—the shock troops, the local counter-attack, the “pill-box”—but they considered the enemy purely as a defensive fighter and not as a potential assailant. Hutier’s performance at Riga passed unnoticed, and Caporetto, when it came, was set down to the broken Italian *moral*. It is to the credit of the British Command that they were the first to revise the offensive tactics of the Somme, and that their new solution was in the main features identical with that of the enemy; but whereas Germany at once applied her conclusion wholesale, the more perfect British version remained an isolated experiment.

The idea originated with Sir Julian Byng, who had commanded the Canadian Corps at the taking of the Vimy heights and had succeeded Allenby in charge of the Third Army. In conjunction with Major-General Hugh Elles of the Tank Corps he worked out a scheme of attack in September, for which Haig’s consent was obtained 20th October. A suitable area was found in that section of the Siegfried Line which lay in front of Havrincourt Wood, between the Bapaume-Cambrai road and the Scheldt Canal. It was a country of rolling downs, grey with the withered grasses of November, and patched with the rank and blackened growths of thistle and dock and ragwort which sprang up on land once closely tilled and now derelict. From any ridge east of Bapaume the observer could grasp the terrain at a glance. Eight miles from our front rose the spires and factory chimneys of the town of Cambrai. Half-way the deep cutting of the Scheldt Canal zig-zagged across the landscape, for the most part empty of water, but forming a better barrier than any running stream. On the west side of the canal the long Flesquières ridge ran north and south, rising on the left to the dominating point of Bourlon Wood between the Arras and Bapaume roads—a wood of oak and ash, with a dense undergrowth, and still untouched by shell-fire. East of the canal the ground fell away to the flat plains of the Scheldt, but the village of Rumilly offered a flank position on the last incline of the uplands.

The merits of this area for a surprise attack were many. In the first place, it was dry, open country, where tanks could operate. In the second place, behind the British lines, notably in the big wood of Havrincourt, there were places where they might be concealed

without the knowledge of the Germans. In the third place, the sector was very thinly held by the enemy. Finally, any considerable British advance would endanger a vital part of the enemy's front, and seriously hamper his communications. Cambrai, a main centre, would be brought under our guns, as would the great lateral railway which ran through it. If Bournonville could be won, the canal crossed, and a defensive flank established towards Rumilly, we should command the main Arras-Cambrai road, and take in rear the enemy positions in the southern part of the Drocourt-Quéant line and the Sensée valley.

The British tactical plan was conceived on novel lines. There was to be no preliminary bombardment. Tanks were relied upon to break through the enemy's wire, and the six infantry divisions allotted for the attack were to advance on a six-mile front, supported as far as possible by our guns shooting at unregistered targets. The German defences were complicated and very strong. First came certain forward positions in the nature of outposts at the ridge of La Vacquerie and at the north-eastern corner of Havrincourt Wood — a method borrowed from Armin's system in the Ypres salient. Behind lay the Siegfried Line proper, running north-west to Havrincourt from the Scheldt Canal at Banteux — a line with specially wide trenches which, it was hoped, would prevent the passage of tanks. Acres of dense wire lay before it, wire nowhere less than fifty yards wide; it was calculated that to cut it with artillery would take five weeks and cost twenty millions of money. A mile or so behind that lay the famous Siegfried Reserve Line, tunnelled to a great depth and heavily wired. Between three and four miles to the east ran the final German position, covering Cambrai, from Beaurevoir by Masnières to Marquion.

Haig's object was not the capture of Cambrai; that might happen, but his advance in the direction of the town was rather to secure his right flank. His main objective was towards the north-east, Bournonville, and the Arras-Cambrai road. He hoped to break through all the enemy's lines of defence on the first day; and, since he believed that no serious German reinforcements could appear before forty-eight hours, he considered that he would have time to exploit and secure any success. The cavalry were to be kept ready to go through and disorganize the enemy communications, and he arranged with Pétain to have a French force of infantry and cavalry within call in the event of fortune providing one of those happy chances which he had hitherto been denied.



The possibilities which he had in mind are best described in the words of his dispatch : —

“In view of the strength of the German forces on the front of my attack, and the success with which secrecy was maintained during our preparations, I had calculated that the enemy’s prepared defences would be captured in the first rush. I had good hope that his resisting power behind those defences would then be so enfeebled for a period that we should be able on the same day to establish ourselves quickly and completely on the dominating Bourlon Ridge from Fontaine-Nôtre-Dame to Mœuvres, and to secure our right flank along a line including the Bonavis Ridge, Crèvecœur, and Rumilly to Fontaine-Nôtre-Dame. Even if this did not prove possible within the first twenty-four hours, a second day would be at our disposal before the enemy’s reserves could begin to arrive in any formidable numbers. Meanwhile, with no wire and no prepared defences to hamper them, it was reasonable to hope that masses of cavalry would find it possible to pass through, whose task would be thoroughly to disorganize the enemy’s system of command and inter-communication in the whole area between the Canal de l’Escaut, the river Sensée and the Canal du Nord, as well as to the east and north-east of Cambrai. My intentions as regards subsequent exploitation were to push westward and north-westward, taking the Hindenburg Line in reverse from Mœuvres to the river Scarpe, and capturing all the enemy’s defences, and probably most of his garrisons, lying westward of a line from Cambrai northwards to the Sensée, and south of that river and the Scarpe. Time would have been required to enable us to develop and complete the operation; but the prospects of gaining the necessary time, by the use of cavalry in the manner outlined above, were, in my opinion, good enough to justify the attempt to execute the plan.”

There will be a few to deny that this plan was both bold and feasible. As a scheme for a substantive operation it was at least as skilful and prudent as any which the British High Command had yet adopted. But was the battle which followed to be considered a substantive operation? The Commander-in-Chief has described how weary were his troops after the close of Third Ypres; how inadequately his losses had been replaced; and explained that many of the new drafts included in the ranks of his armies were not yet fully trained. In such circumstances a substantive operation — that is, one designed to occupy and hold a considerable extent of new ground — must be hazardous in the extreme; for even if only a small force was required in the first instance, and if this force could be supplied from comparatively fresh divisions, it was certain that, as the battle developed, reserves must be found,

and that these could only be got from tired and depleted troops who had already borne the brunt of Third Ypres. Cambrai has been described as no more than a raid on a generous scale. Now, it is the essence of a raid that it does not occupy ground; the men engaged in it harass and weaken the enemy, and then return to their old line. But Haig contemplated an advance on the first day of between five and six miles, and thereafter elaborate operations to the north and north-west. Such successes would in any case demand large reinforcements. Again, the essence of a raid is that, if the enemy proves unexpectedly strong, it is given up. But since this attempt was on so large a scale, would it be possible to withdraw the troops after their initial advance, should the situation change? Was it not more probable that they would become so deeply committed that they must continue the battle? It may fairly be said in criticism of the Cambrai plan that it contemplated a limited and local operation, which in the nature of things could not be limited and localized, much less easily broken off. It designed a raid with a few divisions; but such a raid must inevitably develop into a battle and demand supports, and these supports could only come from troops who *ex hypothesi* were in no condition for a new and desperate conflict.

The Cambrai sector from Bullecourt to the Oise was held by the German II. Army, under von der Marwitz, which at the moment had only eleven divisions in line. In the threatened area it had only three—from left to right, the 5th, the 2nd, and the 20th, with three more in reserve. A fresh division from the Eastern front, the 107th, was in process of arriving. The British force was the Third Army, which had not been seriously engaged since the Battle of Arras in the spring. On the six-mile front of the main attack Sir Julian Byng had in line six divisions—from left to right, the 36th, 62nd, 51st, 6th, 20th, and 12th. On the left, in the Bullecourt area, two divisions, the 16th and the 3rd, were detailed for a subsidiary attack. In immediate support in the main area was the 29th Division. The mounted force at his disposal contained the 1st, 2nd, 4th, and 5th Cavalry Divisions.

Secrecy was vital in the matter, and Byng directed the preparations with consummate skill. Till the very eve of the battle few even in the Tank Corps knew the plan. The flotillas of tanks were assembled in every possible place which offered cover, notably in Havrincourt Wood. The tank is not a noiseless machine, and it says much for the ingenuity of the Third Army that the enemy had no inkling of our designs. It was anxious work, for a single

enemy airplane over Havrincourt or a single indiscreet prisoner taken would have wrecked the plan. Before the attack the enemy did indeed take prisoners, but he seems to have learned little from them, though it would appear that he suspected tanks in the neighbourhood and served out special ammunition. Had he been really forewarned, he might have so honeycombed his front with contact mines that our advance would have been completely frustrated. The weather favoured Byng. The days before the assault saw the low grey skies and the clinging mist of late November.

Tuesday, 20th November, dawned with heavy clouds that promised rain before evening. At twenty minutes past six a solitary gun broke the silence. It was the signal, and from just north of the Bapaume road to the hamlet of Gonnellieu in the south a long line of tanks crept forward into the fog, their commander, General Elles, leading them like an admiral in his "flagship." Gas and smoke were released everywhere from the Scarpe to St. Quentin, and in front of the tanks a dense smoke barrage blinded the enemy's guns. The British artillery broke loose and deluged the German rear with shells, while, behind the tanks, quietly and leisurely moved the six divisions of assault. At Epéhy on the south and at Bullecourt on the north subsidiary attacks were launched at the same moment. The enemy was taken utterly unawares. The tanks cut great lanes in his wire, broke up his machine-gun nests, and enfiladed his trenches, while the British infantry followed to complete the work. At once the outposts went, the main Siegfried Line followed soon, and presently the fighting was among the tunnels of the Reserve Line. By half-past ten that also had vanished, and the British troops, with cavalry close behind, were advancing to their final objectives in open country.

Let us glance at the progress of the several divisions. On the left, west of the Canal du Nord, the 36th (Ulster) Division drove the enemy from the canal bank, pushed up the Siegfried Line, and carried the whole German trench system west of the canal as far as the Bapaume road. On their right the 62nd Division of West Riding Territorials began that brilliant advance which was to give them the honours of the day. They took Havrincourt village, turned northward, carried the Siegfried Reserve Line, and occupied Graincourt, where their accompanying tanks had the satisfaction of themselves destroying two anti-tank guns. Before evening they were in Anneux, an advance of four and a half miles from the original front — the longest advance that so far in the



war any single British division had made in one day. South of the Yorkshiremen the 51st (Highland Territorials) were adding to their many laurels. They breasted the slopes of the Flesquières ridge, and carried the formidable defences of the château grounds by noon. They were held up, however, in front of the village, which remained uncaptured during the day, the apex of a sharp salient. Here our tanks suffered from direct hits from the German field guns beyond the crest of the ridge, many of them obtained by a German artillery officer who served a gun single-handed till he died at his post. "The great bravery of this officer," says the official dispatch, "aroused the admiration of all ranks." South of Flesquières the 6th Division took Ribecourt, while the 20th Division, after disposing of La Vacquerie, stormed the defences of the hill which we called Welsh Ridge towards Marcoing. The 12th Division, on the extreme right, moved along the Bonavis ridge, and, after a fierce struggle, took Lateau Wood, which sheltered many German batteries. Meantime the 29th Division had been pushed through between the 6th and the 20th as a spearhead. Accompanied by tanks, it took Marcoing and Neuf Wood and the passage at that point of the Scheldt Canal; while the 6th Division, advancing from Ribecourt in the afternoon, moved north and seized Noyelles-sur-l'Escaut. The 29th then turned south and entered Masnières, but not before the enemy had managed so to weaken the bridge over the canal that the first tank which tried to cross fell through. They had trouble also in the north end of the village, with the result that the Germans had the chance to occupy Rumilly and the sector of their final line of defence south of it.

All this time the cavalry were fighting in close alliance with the infantry — the 1st Cavalry Division in the northern part of the battleground, and the 5th Cavalry Division in the south. They were moving on Cantaing and Anneux; but the vital point was the bridge at Masnières, and unfortunately that was half destroyed. This delayed what might have otherwise been a final blow to the enemy defence, for had the cavalry been able to cross the canal in force there was little between them and Cambrai. A temporary bridge was, indeed, constructed south of Masnières, and one squadron of the Fort Garry Horse, belonging to General Seeley's Canadian Brigade of the 5th Cavalry Division, crossed, broke through the Beaurevoir-Masnières line, charged and captured a German battery, cut up a body of 300 German infantry, and only retired when most of its horses had been killed or wounded.



The day closed with a remarkable record of success. The subsidiary attacks had done well, the 16th and 3rd Divisions having captured the remainder of the Siegfried Reserve Line at Bullecourt, with 700 prisoners. On the whole front already over 5,000 prisoners had been brought in. Sir Julian Byng had carried the outposts, the Siegfried Line, and the Siegfried Reserve Line on most of his front, and had broken into the final line at Masnières. He had won nearly all his objectives; but at three points and vital points, he had not succeeded. He had not got Rumilly and Crèvecœur, and so had not yet obtained that defensive flank which he needed for his swing to the north. Nor had he won the crossings of the Scheldt Canal, and breached the final line widely enough to let the cavalry through. For this the destruction of the bridge at Masnières was to blame, and more especially, perhaps, the check of the 51st Division at Flesquières village. This last also prevented the attainment of the most important objective of all, the Bourlon ridge, the garrison of which had by now been reinforced. Only twenty-four hours remained to complete the work before the enemy would have received supports. In that time Bourlon might be won, and perhaps Rumilly and Crèvecœur; but, now that the first shock of surprise had passed, the chance for the cavalry was gone.

The rain began to fall after midday on the 20th, and continued into the morning of the 21st. By 8 a.m. on that morning Flesquières village had fallen, turned from the north-west, and by eleven the final German line had been breached to the north of Masnières. The enemy counter-attacked from Rumilly and was beaten off, and at Noyelles part of the 29th Division and dismounted regiments of the 1st and 5th Cavalry Divisions were hotly engaged during the day. On our right we captured the hamlet of Les Rues des Vignes, between Bonavis and Crèvecœur, but lost it again; and our attack towards Crèvecœur itself was hung up by machine-gun fire at the canal crossings. On our extreme left the 36th Division, pushing north of the Bapaume road, got into the skirts of Mœuvres, where it found a strong resistance. But the vital point was on the left centre, where the 51st and 62nd Divisions, assisted by tanks and squadrons of the 1st Cavalry Division, were struggling desperately towards Bourlon. The advance began at 10.30 a.m., as soon as possible after the clearing of Flesquières. The West Riding troops completed the capture of Anneux, and early in the afternoon the 6th and 51st Divisions took Cantaing, close upon the Scheldt Canal. The High-

landers pressed on to the edge of Bourlon Wood, and late in the evening took the village of Fontaine-Nôtre-Dame, on the Bapaume road between Bourlon and Cambrai. Bourlon Wood itself was a nest of machine guns, which barred the infantry advance, though a few tanks penetrated some way into its recesses.

With dawn on the 22nd the forty-eight hours of grace ended, the period during which the enemy must fight without his reserves. His reinforcements were hurrying up; the night before the 1st Guards Reserve had arrived from Lens, and other divisions were on their way from Flanders and from the Crown Prince in the south. Our new line left the old front at a point half-way between Bourcies and Pronville; ran east through the skirts of Mœuvres to the Canal du Nord; then along the southern face of Bourlon Wood to Fontaine-Nôtre-Dame, where it turned south-east, covering Cantaing, Noyelles, and Masnières, to a point east of the Scheldt Canal half-way between the last-named village and Crèvecœur. Thence it passed along the eastern and southern slopes of the Bonavis ridge to our old front near Gonnellieu. We had failed to win certain vital positions for a defensive flank, such as Rumilly and Crèvecœur; above all, we did not hold the dominating ground of Bourlon Wood and village. Clearly we could not remain where we were. Either we must go on till Bourlon was taken, or fall back to the Flesquières ridge and secure our gains. Haig had now to decide whether to treat the action as a lucky raid, and hold himself fortunate for what he had already achieved, without risking more; or to regard it as a substantive battle, and press for a decision.

Inevitably he leaned to the second alternative. To fall back when much has been won and still more seems within reach, is possible for few commanders, even when they have less weighty reasons for their conclusion than were present to the mind of the British general. The choice which he now made had been really implied in his original plan. He was impressed by the acute significance of the Bourlon ridge. If he could only gain and hold it, the German front south of the Scarpe and Sensée would be turned, and the enemy must be compelled to abandon all the elaborate defences of that sector. It was such a nerve-centre as we had rarely before had the chance of striking at. It was true that German reinforcements were arriving, and that our troops were so exhausted that we too must delay a little for reliefs. But he considered that any German reserves that could appear for several days would be only sufficient to replace the enemy losses

in the past fighting, and that there was some evidence of a wholesale German withdrawal. In any case he believed that he had sufficient forces to strike at Bourlon before that position could be strengthened. He had hopes of receiving immediate reinforcements from Pétain. Two British divisions, under orders for Italy, had been placed at his disposal, and with this accession of strength he hoped to win the ridge forthwith. Lastly, there were ever present to his mind the needs of the Italian situation. Any pressure on the Cambrai front, even if unsuccessful in its main object, would do something to relieve the strain of the Piave. He accordingly decided to continue the action till Bourlon was won. In the light of subsequent events it is clear that the decision was unwise, since he had too small a force to achieve his purpose and to defend his gains against the attack which the enemy could develop. But to foresee the future with precision is not in the power of the most sagacious commander, and to take risks is of the essence of war.

The 22nd of November was spent in relieving some of the divisions which had suffered most in the battle, and organizing the ground won on our right and right centre. A little after mid-day the enemy regained Fontaine-Nôtre-Dame, which was commanded not only by the height of Bourlon, but by the positions at La Folie Wood and on the canal towards Cambrai. That night the 36th (Ulster) and the 56th Division of London Territorials were engaged in the Mœuvres area, and a battalion of the latter carried Tadpole Copse, a point in the Siegfried Line west of Mœuvres, which was of value as a flanking position for the attack on Bourlon Wood. On the morning of the 23rd came the serious assault on the Bourlon heights. The 51st Division attacked Fontaine-Nôtre-Dame, but was repulsed; in the afternoon it tried again, but could not clear the village, though our tanks entered it and remained there till dusk, to the inconvenience of the enemy. Meantime on its left the 40th Division attacked the Wood, captured all of it, including the highest point of the ridge, and entered Bourlon village. The enemy here was the 3rd Guards Division, and a counter-attack by all three battalions of the 9th Grenadier Regiment was completely repulsed before evening.

The battle was now concentrated in the Bourlon area, and for some days in that ragged wood, and around the shells of the two villages, a fierce and bloody strife continued. On the morning of the 24th a counter-attack drove us out of the north-east corner of the wood, but the 14th Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders of the 51st Division, the dismounted 15th Hussars, and what was left



of the 119th Brigade of the 40th Division, re-established our front. Assaults from the west were also repulsed by dismounted cavalry. That afternoon the 40th Division attacked Bourlon village, and captured the whole of it. All along the line from Tadpole Copse to Fontaine it was clear that the enemy was gaining in strength, and next evening, 25th November, Bourlon village was retaken by the Germans, though part of a British battalion held out in the south-east corner till they were relieved two days later. The 40th Division, which had had most of the fighting here, was now replaced by the 62nd Division, and the enemy continued the press so hard that on the 26th he had entered the northern skirts of Bourlon Wood.

Our position was now too awkward to be long maintained, and on the 27th we made an effort to secure the whole Bourlon ridge as well as Fontaine-Nôtre-Dame. Two divisions, supported by tanks, were designed for the task—the Guards against Fontaine, and the 62nd on their left against Bourlon. Once more we succeeded in gaining both villages; once again counter-attacks later in the day drove us out of them. We held a strong position on the Bourlon ridge, but we had not yet established it. Accordingly we relieved the divisions which had borne the brunt of the fighting, and set to work to design a final attack which should give us what we sought. Meantime on other parts of the line we had improved our situation. The 12th Division on our right had pushed out towards Banteux, on the Scheldt Canal, and on our left the 16th Division had won ground in the Siegfried Line north-west of Bullecourt. In the week's fighting we had taken over 10,500 prisoners and 142 guns; we had carried 14,000 yards of the main Siegfried Line and 10,000 yards of the Reserve Line; we had wrested more than sixty square miles from the enemy, and retaken ten villages. We now held a salient formed like a rough rectangle, some ten miles wide and six miles deep. It was a salient awkwardly placed, for we had not won either on north or east the positions which would have made it secure, and during that week the enemy, by means of his admirable communications, was hurrying up troops for a counterstroke.

Cambrai had violently startled the German High Command. They had not dreamed of such an event, and they realized that only by the narrowest margin had they escaped catastrophe. The joy bells which rang prematurely in England woke uneasy thoughts in Germany, and the people for a moment were gravely depressed.



It was Ludendorff's business to cheer his countrymen by a dramatic counterstroke; for, knowing the immense sacrifice he was to demand from the nation in the coming spring, he could not afford to permit any check to their confidence. Accordingly, during the last week of November, fresh divisions were brought to the battlefield, and on the 29th Marwitz issued an order to the II. Army:—

"The English, by throwing into the fight countless tanks on 20th November, gained a victory near Cambrai. Their intention was to break through; but they did not succeed, thanks to the brilliant resistance of our troops. We are now going to turn their embryonic victory into a defeat by an encircling counter-attack. The Fatherland is watching you, and expects every man to do his duty."

The British High Command were aware of this activity; they were even aware that its area extended outside the battleground as far south as Vendhuile; and they took measures to prepare for the worst. In the area between Mœuvres and Cantaing they had two fresh divisions—the 47th London Territorials and the 2nd—and one, the 56th, which had been only partially engaged. On the ten miles between Cantaing and the ravine at Banteux lay five divisions—the 62nd, 6th, 29th, 20th, and 12th—all of which had been previously in action, and were more or less weary. South of Banteux our line was very weak; but there the 55th Division held a front which had been in our possession for months, and consequently its defence was well organized. Moreover, our hold on the Bonavis ridge increased the security of the line between Banteux and Vendhuile. In immediate reserve were the Guards and the 2nd Cavalry Division, and in general support the 48th (South Midland) Division, and the 4th and 5th Cavalry Divisions. It seemed certain that, since our hold on Bourlon ridge was so insecure, and the place meant so much to the enemy, the chief weight of any counterstroke would fall there, and in that area, as events showed, we were well prepared. Everywhere on our front the warning was given, and especial precautions were taken on that bit of our old line between Villers Guislain and Vendhuile. "Troops were warned to expect an attack, additional machine guns were placed to secure supporting points, and divisional reserves were closed up. Special patrols were also sent out to watch for signs of any hostile advance."

Nevertheless, the enemy secured a tactical surprise. His plan was to strike hard on our two flanks, and then to press in the centre.

On his right he hoped to win the line Flesquières-Havrin-court, and on his left the line Ribecourt-Trescault-Beaucamp-Gouzeaucourt, and so nip off all the British troops in the front of the salient. Four divisions were allotted for the southern flank attack, three for the northern. He used also his new tactics, designed on the Eastern front and first practised at Caporetto; and these tactics meant surprise.

At 7.30 a.m., on the morning of Friday, 30th November, a storm of gas shells broke out on the ten miles between Masnières and Vendhuille. There was no steadily advancing barrage to warn us of the approach of the enemy's infantry, and the thick morning mist enabled him to reach our trenches when our men were still under cover. The result was that from the north end of the Bonavis ridge to Gonnellieu, and from Gonnellieu to Vendhuille, our line was overwhelmed. At once the enemy was on the edge of La Vacquerie, and pressing up the deep ravine between Villers Guislain and Gonnellieu. Isolated British detachments in advantageous positions offered a gallant resistance. Such were the parties at Lateau Wood and south-east of La Vacquerie; such were the field artillery brigade north-east of La Vacquerie, the troops on the high ground east of Villers Guislain, and south of that village the garrison at Limerick Post. But the advance could not be stayed. The batteries at La Vacquerie were taken—the first British guns to be lost since Second Ypres—and at 9 a.m. the enemy was in Gouzeaucourt.

The situation was grave indeed, for our position in the front of the salient was turned in flank and rear. It was saved by the 29th Division at Masnières. That gallant body—made up of English, Scottish, Welsh, Irish, Guernsey, and Newfoundland battalions—had by its exploits at Gallipoli and on the Somme won a reputation second to none in the British Army. This day it gained still higher renown. Though the enemy, covering it on flank and rear, overran its divisional and brigade headquarters, and took its batteries in reverse, it did not yield its ground. Swinging back its right to form a defensive flank, it clung to Masnières and beat off all attacks. Its heroic resistance defeated the German plan of a frontal assault, and gave Byng time to attend to his broken right wing.

At midday the Guards came into action west of Gouzeaucourt, with the 5th Cavalry Division filling the gap on their right towards Villers Guislain. Gouzeaucourt was retaken, and for the rest of the day there was a fierce struggle on the St. Quentin ridge and at

Gauche Wood, east of the village. There every kind of unit was engaged—three battalions of tanks, a field artillery brigade of the 47th Division, a detachment of the 29th Division, and a company of North Midland sappers. By the evening they had found touch with the garrison of La Vacquerie, who in turn were linked up with the defenders of Masnières, and our line was reconstituted.

Meantime, the other part of the enemy force had hurled itself against the front between Mœuvres and the Scheldt Canal, held by the 56th, 2nd, and 47th Divisions. These three divisions, one of old regulars and two of London Territorials, were forewarned of the attack by a severe preliminary bombardment followed by a barrage. A little after 9 a.m. the German infantry came on in wave after wave, so that as many as eleven waves advanced in one area during the day. The fiercest thrust was west of Bourlon Wood. There a company of the 17th Royal Fusiliers of the 2nd Division was in course of being withdrawn from an exposed position when the storm burst on it. Its commander "sent three of his platoons back, and with a rearguard, composed of the remainder of his company, held off the enemy's infantry until the main position had been organized. Having faithfully accomplished their task, this rearguard died fighting to the end with their faces to the enemy." The day was starred with heroic deeds. Between Mœuvres and the Canal du Nord a company of the 13th Essex of the 2nd Division found itself isolated. "After maintaining a splendid and successful resistance throughout the day, whereby the pressure upon our main line was greatly relieved, at 4 p.m. this company held a council of war, at which the two remaining company officers, the company sergeant-major, and the platoon sergeants were present, and unanimously determined to fight to the last, and have 'no surrender.' Two runners who were sent to notify this decision to battalion headquarters succeeded in getting through to our lines, and delivered their message. During the remainder of the afternoon and far into the following night this gallant company were heard fighting, and there is little room for doubt that they carried out to a man their heroic resolution." So, too, when three posts held by the 1st Royal Berkshires of the 2nd Division were overwhelmed. "When, two days later, the three posts were regained, such a heap of German dead lay in and around them that the bodies of our own men were hidden." So, too, when on the right of the 47th Division a gap was found between the 1/5 and 1/15 battalions of the London Regiment, the two battalion commanders counter-attacked with every man they

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could lay their hands on—cooks, orderlies, runners, and signallers—and restored the position. Before such soldierly resolution the German waves broke and ebbed, leaving great numbers of dead, and by the evening the assault had most signally failed.

But the battle was not over. On 1st December the Guards advanced, captured the St. Quentin ridge and entered Gonnellieu, taking several hundred prisoners and many machine guns. Farther south, with the help of tanks and dismounted Indian cavalry, they took Gauche Wood, but failed to enter Villers Guislain. There was heavy fighting also at Bourslon and Marcoing, and the 29th Division at Masnières beat off no less than nine attacks. But the Masnières position, with the Bonavis ridge in the enemy's hands, was now precarious, and that night the 29th Division withdrew to a line west of the village. Next day there was a further withdrawal. The enemy pressed up Welsh Ridge, north-east of La Vacquerie, and won ground north and west of Gonnellieu. On the 3rd he took La Vacquerie, and since our position beyond the Scheldt Canal near Marcoing was now becoming an acute salient, our troops were brought to the west bank of the canal.

Little happened for the next two days but local fighting; but it was clear to Haig that, although the enemy's vigour seemed to be exhausted, the British front was in a highly unsatisfactory state. Either we must regain the Bonavis ridge, which meant a new and severe engagement for which we had not the troops, or we must draw in our line to the Flesquières ridge. He had no other course before him but to give up the Bourslon position for which his troops had so gallantly fought. The shortening of the line was begun on the night of the 4th and completed by the morning of the 7th. The operation was achieved no less skilfully than the similar drawing in of the Ypres front in May 1915. The new front, which in its northern part corresponded roughly to the old Siegfried Reserve Line, ran from the Canal du Nord one and a half miles north of Havrincourt, north of Flesquières and Ribecourt, and along Welsh Ridge to a point one and a half miles north by east of La Vacquerie. South of that it ran west of Gonnellieu and Villers Guislain, rejoining our old front at Vendhuile. For some days there was local fighting at Bullecourt, but the battle was over, and by the end of the year the Cambrai front had returned to the normal winter inactivity.

The main criticism on this remarkable action has been already alluded to—that its conception was based on a fallacy, since it

would inevitably involve an extension of operations for which we had not adequate strength. A secondary criticism is that it should have been broken off on 22nd November, when the forty-eight hours of grace had passed and we had not secured our most vital objectives. The replies to both arguments have been suggested in the preceding pages. Viewed in the light of the central strategy of the war, Cambrai effected nothing. It was a brilliant feat of arms, which reflected great credit on the British troops and their commanders, but it had no real bearing upon the fortunes of either combatant. It did not weaken the enemy in his positions, for we had to surrender Bourlon; it did not weaken him in *personnel*, for the losses were much the same on both sides; nor in *moral*, for he retrieved his first disaster. Looked at solely as a feat of arms, the honours were, perhaps, with Sir Julian Byng, for on a balance the British retained sixteen square miles of enemy territory, while the Germans on 30th November won only seven miles of British, and our sixteen included a seven-mile stretch of the Siegfried Line. It is difficult to see that the British Commander-in-Chief could have acted otherwise than he did. He took a legitimate risk. Had he succeeded, his bold strategy would have been lauded to the skies, and he cannot be blamed because he just fell short of the purpose he had set himself. One good result was indisputable. Enemy divisions destined for the Italian front were diverted to Cambrai, and at a most critical period in the stand on the Piave the German concentration against Italy was suspended for at least a fortnight.

Had Haig succeeded to the full, it is unlikely that his success would have had any lasting influence on the campaign, for he had not the strength to follow it up. Cambrai was not one of the moments in the war when the Allies had in their hands a chance of a decisive victory.\* But there was that in the German counter-stroke the full understanding of which, had it been possible for our General Staff, might have had a potent influence on the future. The attack of the enemy right on Bourlon was in the traditional German manner, reminding those who had served in the autumn of 1914 of the methods of First Ypres. There was the heavy initial bombardment, and then wave after wave of massed infantry. But it was different on his left between Masnières and Vendhuille. It was believed in Britain at the time that there had been some

\* Perhaps there was only one such moment—in the beginning of 1917, when, if the plan of Haig and Joffre had been allowed to stand, and Nivelle's Aisne plan rejected, Germany might have been beaten in the field before she could benefit from the Russian Revolution.

defect in our intelligence system which accounted for the surprise, but it is clear that there was no such defect. We had all the knowledge of the enemy attack which any Intelligence Corps could give. Nor were we deficient in artillery, nor greatly outnumbered, for the enemy superiority was not more than four to three. Nevertheless it was a surprise, for a system was being tested which had not yet been tried upon a British force. It was the new system which the Allied Staff had not yet mastered—the tactics of Riga, of Caporetto. The lesson was missed; but four months later the armies of France and Britain were to read it in letters of fire.

With Cambrai closed the campaign of 1917 on the Western front, save that the guns were still growling on the Piave, though there the worst crisis had passed. It had been a year of hard fighting for both France and Britain. The former, after the bitter disappointment of the early days of the Second Battle of the Aisne, had hewn her way patiently to success, till she had cleared the Aisne heights, and won back all but a mile or two of the sacred Verdun soil. Britain had had the harder task and the more continuous fighting. From the first days of January, when the enemy began to retreat from the Somme uplands, to the middle of December, when Cambrai died down, her forces had been scarcely a week out of battle. Arras, Messines, Third Ypres, and Cambrai were actions as great as any in the history of British arms. We had taken more than 125,000 prisoners; we had wrested from the enemy every single piece of dominating ground between the Oise and the North Sea. It had been a year of successes, signal and yet indeterminate. The Germans had fallen back upon new positions prepared by the labour of prisoners and in these masterpieces of field fortification were able to abide. The policy of the Somme was now seen to be out of date. The war had concentrated on one front, the Western, and we could not hope to wear our opponents down by the method of limited objectives, and then break them, for they had found a new reservoir of supply.

The dominant fact at the close of 1917 was that the enemy was now able to resume the offensive at will. He had some 150 divisions in the West and 79 in the East, for though he had brought westward 23 divisions since 1st October, he had the habit of returning eastward certain worn-out units. But the men he was bringing from Russia were the cream of his manhood, and the business of forming and training new shock-battalions went busily



on. Moreover, he was far from having exhausted that source of supply, and presently he could add another half-million of men and an infinity of guns to his Western strength. The long German defensive, which had lasted since Verdun, was at an end. Young soldiers and irresponsible civilians professed to welcome a German assault; but wise men were uneasy. They knew that the German Staff would presently make a desperate effort to secure a decision before Russia could recover from her maladies and ere America was ready. The German defence had been conducted in a long-prepared fortified zone; our success had given us a new line, often only a few weeks old, and we had not the German assiduity in field work; how, it was asked, should we fare against a resolute offensive? Again, we were deplorably short of men. Sir Douglas Haig had never received during 1917 the minimum levies he had asked for, and had been compelled to put into the line of battle men imperfectly trained, and to strain good divisions to the breaking-point. Too little was being done at home to raise fresh forces. The anomaly of Ireland remained; the vigorous "comb-out" of non-essential industries, so often promised, had not yet been undertaken.

The mind of Britain was exercised with a military problem which even the dumbest felt to be growing urgent. In a subsequent chapter we shall examine its reaction upon our political life in the discussions as to a unified War Staff for all the Allies, and the appointment of a Generalissimo. The steps taken with regard to the former were timid, but, so far as they went, useful. The latter question, to which only one answer could be given by thoughtful men, was obscured by a fog of false sentiment and misplaced national pride. The British people, willing to do all that was asked of them, received no clear word of leading either from the embarrassed and somewhat obscure pleas of the soldier or the convenient rhetoric of the politician. To the observer, familiar with his countrymen, it was apparent that a drastic remedy would not be adopted except under the goad of an immense disaster.

## CHAPTER LXXXIX

### THE CONQUEST OF EAST AFRICA

*January 1915—November 26, 1917*

The Position in 1915—Lettow-Vorbeck's Policy—Arrival of General Smuts—His Strategical Plan—The Gap of Kilimanjaro passed—Van Deventer marches on Kondoa Irangi—The Advance down the Tanga Railway—Capture of Tanga—Advance on Kilossa—The Fighting astride the Central Railway—Dar-es-Salaam occupied—The Rufiji crossed—Smuts returns to England—The Campaign of Hoskins and Van Deventer—The Colony cleared of the Enemy—Summary of East African Campaign.

THE close of 1917 saw what had once been the colony of German East Africa wholly in British hands, though fighting still continued inside the marches of Mozambique. The story of the campaign which produced this result deserves to be studied in the closest detail, alike for its masterly strategy, its picturesque interest, and its fine record of human endurance; but in a work such as this it can be treated only on the broadest lines, for it was no more than an episode in the great struggle of the nations. Yet even the barest sketch will reveal the extraordinary difficulties of the campaigning and the magnitude of the performance alike of conquerors and conquered.

We left the narrative in the early days of 1915, when the slender British forces were definitely on the defensive. The Germans in East Africa were like the Germans in Europe, with enemies on all sides and blockaded by sea; but the enemies were little more than a handful, and the encirclement was futile. Operating on interior lines, and with communications immensely superior to those of his opponents, the problem of Lettow-Vorbeck was at the start an easy one. The British forces had been drawn chiefly from India, and there were also one regular British infantry battalion, a number of battalions of the King's African Rifles, and various irregular units, mounted and unmounted, raised among the settlers. The little army was starved of men, for it was the British policy

that, as far as possible, no troops should be used in East Africa which could be employed in the main theatre in Europe; as it was the aim of Lettow-Vorbeck to compel the opposite.

In November 1914, as we have seen, General Aitken had failed signally at Tanga. In January 1915 came a second British defeat at Jassin. In April of that year Major-General Tighe became Commander-in-Chief, but he had not the strength to begin serious offensive operations. During 1915 there were a number of minor engagements, chiefly on the Uganda side and in the south-west, where a small force was at work on the Rhodesia frontier, while Belgian troops were also busy on the Congo border. But at the beginning of 1916 the honours lay clearly with the Germans. They had their colony intact, as Governor von Schnee proudly proclaimed, and they believed that, since they were self-supporting, they could resist any reinforcements which the British could bring. Tropical Africa was their main defence; climate and distance, swamps and mountains, were better safeguards than numbers and munitions. And they had cause for their confidence, for they had boldly kept the initiative. They were for ever raiding the Uganda and the Voi-Maktau railways, and in the gap of Kilimanjaro, the main gate of the north, they held Taveta and the line of the Lumi River inside British territory.

In considering the remarkable achievements of General Smuts and his South African contingents, we must not forget the long, heartbreaking struggle of the troops, white and coloured, who held the fort till February 1916. For eighteen months they had borne the heat and burden of the climate, without chance of leave, without adequate supplies, with little to cheer them in their past record, and with no hope of an offensive in the future. One white officer, often in the early twenties, with a handful of natives, was left to patrol a long length of line in the face of vigilant and aggressive enemies. In that wide and solitary land there was none of the stimulus which comes from a consciousness of supports at call and neighbours near. The time was soon to come when the little army was caught up in a great movement, and swept the enemy's domain from all points of the compass. But let us recognize the desperate strain on mind and body of the far-flung lines of defence which during 1915 sat in dreary and perilous vigil on the northern borders.

At the beginning of 1916 East Africa was the only colony left to Germany. She had lost successively Togoland, South-West Africa, and the Cameroons, and she was the more determined to cling to her richest possession. She hoped by her victories over the

Allies in Europe to be able to dictate terms as to Africa, and her terms were not less than a German domination from the Atlantic to the Indian Ocean, embracing British and German East Africa, the Belgian and French Congo, Angola, the Cameroons, Nigeria, and all West Africa to Cape Verde. Mittel-Afrika had taken as definite a shape as Mittel-Europa. She wished it strategically as a flank guard for her conquests in the Near East; she wished it as a controlled producing ground of those raw materials which were disturbing the minds of her economists; she wished it as a recruiting ground for an army of a million men, trained in the German fashion, which would terrorize the unwarlike peoples of the few African territories that remained to other Powers. She dreamed of a day when Mittel-Afrika would have a population of fifty million natives and half a million Germans; when great cities would have sprung up on Chad and Tanganyika and the Congo; and when the Lake Chad express, carrying a freight of German bagmen, would run regularly from Berlin. The Emperor had ordered his people in Africa to hold out to the last; and, with such a dream before them, it was their business to yield nothing till the final victory in Europe should gain everything.\*

Lettow-Vorbeck's chief difficulty was likely to be shortage of arms and ammunition, for the large stock with which he began the war was bound to be depleted. He was fortunate, however, in receiving various unexpected windfalls. When the *Königsberg* was destroyed by our warships in the Rufiji River in July 1915, her ten 4-inch guns were saved and moved up country. We proclaimed a blockade of the coast on February 28, 1915; but three ships managed to get through—the *Adjutant* to Dar-es-Salaam in February 1915, the *Rubens* from Hamburg to Mansa Bay in April 1915, and the *Maria* to Sudi Bay in March 1916. Ammunition was also manufactured in local workshops, as were other supplies—such as benzine, paraffin, leather, rubber, and quinine. All the resources of a rich colony were applied to the business of war. It is difficult to overpraise the vigour and adaptability of the German effort, and in Lettow-Vorbeck the colony had a commander of infinite resource, courage, and persistence. Before the arrival of

\* The German views on Africa will be found set out in General Smuts's address to the Royal Geographical Society (*Geographical Journal*, March 1918) in Emil Zimmermann's *Das Deutsche Kaiserlich Mittel-Afrika als Grundlage einer neuen Deutschen Weltpolitik* (1917), translated into English by Edwyn Bevan, 1918; in Dr. Solf's article in the *Colonial Calendar* for 1917, and in his numerous speeches; and in the article by Delbrück in the *Preussische Jahrbücher* for February 1917.



General Smuts he disposed in the field of a force larger and better equipped than the thin lines of the besiegers; and even after the arrival of the South African contingents he had an army scarcely inferior to ours in effectives, better adapted for tropical warfare, and confronted with a far simpler problem.

It was the first time in history that a British army had in a tropical wilderness encountered an enemy force officered by highly-trained Europeans. The combination meant that every advantage of terrain and climate would be most cunningly used against us. Since our aim was to conquer the country and expel the enemy or compel him to surrender, our offensive involved interminable marches in areas most unsuitable for a force with wheeled transport moving far from its base. In extent the colony was as large as Germany, Italy, Switzerland, Holland, and Denmark taken together. The coast line on the Indian Ocean was 470 miles long, the western frontier from Lake Victoria to Lake Nyasa some 700 miles, and from Dar-es-Salaam on the east to the terminus of the Central Railway at Tanganyika on the west the distance was 787 miles. The land rose in tiers from the eastern coastal plain to a plateau which broke down steeply towards the trough of the Central Lakes. In the north the frontier with British East Africa was for the most part a chain of mountains, the Usambara and Pare ranges culminating in the great *massif* of Kilimanjaro. The western border, between the lakes, was also mountainous; so difficult that the Belgian force could not invade enemy territory direct from the Congo, but had to be moved north-east round the volcanic ranges to Uganda before they could find a starting-point. In the south-west a mountain range closed the gap between Lakes Tanganyika and Nyasa, and blocked the advance from North-Eastern Rhodesia. More notable still, a chain of ranges—the Nguru, Uluguru, and Mtumba mountains—lay from north to south on the edge of the plateau and the coastal plain, and so formed a series of rallying points for the enemy's defence. Two railways ran from east to west — those from Tanga to Moschi, and from Dar-es-Salaam to Tanganyika. Britain had but one sea base — Mombasa — and everything for the critical northern front had to be landed there.

The struggle, wrote General Smuts, was largely a "campaign against Nature, in which climate, geography, and disease fought more effectively against us than the well-trained forces of the enemy." Of the character of the campaign he has also written: —

"It is impossible for those unacquainted with German East Africa to realize the physical, transport, and supply difficulties of the advance

over this magnificent country of unrivalled scenery and fertility, consisting of great mountain systems alternating with huge plains; with a great rainfall and wide unbridged rivers in the regions of all the mountains, and insufficient surface water on the plains for the needs of an army; with magnificent bush and primeval forest everywhere, pathless, trackless, except for the spoor of the elephant or the narrow footpath of the natives; the malarial mosquito everywhere except on the highest plateaux; everywhere belts infested with the deadly tsetse fly, which makes an end of all animal transport; the ground almost everywhere a rich black or red cotton soil, which any transport converts into mud in the rain or dust in the drought. In the rainy seasons, which occupy about half the year, much of the country becomes a swamp, and military movements become impracticable. And everywhere the fierce heat of equatorial Africa, accompanied by a wild luxuriance of parasitic life, breeding tropical diseases in the unacclimatized whites. These conditions make life for the white man in that country far from a pleasure trip: if, in addition, he has to make long marches on short rations, the trial becomes very severe; if, above all, huge masses of men and material have to be moved over hundreds of miles in a great military expedition against a mobile and alert foe, the strain becomes unendurable. And the chapter of accidents in this region of the unknown! Unseasonable rains cut off expeditions for weeks from their supply bases; animals died by the thousand after passing through an unknown fly belt; mechanical transport got bogged in the marshes, held up by bridges washed away or mountain passes demolished by sudden floods. And the gallant boys marching far ahead under the pitiless African sun, with the fever raging in their blood, pressed ever on after the retreating enemy, often on much-reduced rations and without any of the small comforts which in this region are real necessities. In the story of human endurance the campaign deserves a very special place; and the heroes who went through it uncomplainingly, doggedly, are entitled to all recognition and reverence. Their Commander-in-Chief will remain eternally proud of them."

## I

In the autumn of 1915 Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien, the former commander of the British Second Army in Flanders, had been appointed Commander-in-Chief of the forces in East Africa. Accompanied by a large staff, he sailed for the Cape; but there persistent ill-health compelled him to return to England. At the beginning of 1916 the Hon. J. C. Smuts was appointed in his place, with the rank of lieutenant-general, and on 19th February he arrived at Mombasa. As we have seen in an earlier volume, General Smuts had conducted brilliantly the southern operations in the German

South-West African campaign, and he had since held the portfolio of Defence in the Union Government. In the South African War of 1899-1902 he had been one of the most mobile and successful of the Boer generals. As he put it whimsically: "I believe it is generally admitted that in the Boer War I covered more country than any other commander in the field on either side — and my movement was not always in the direction of the enemy!" He had now to face the reverse problem — how to bring to book an evasive and swiftly-moving enemy in a country compared with which the High Veld was a parterre.

Large contingents had been raised in South Africa, some of which had already arrived on the battleground. There were two formed divisions in the country, apart from the troops on the lakes and the Rhodesia and Nyasaland forces — the 1st Division, under General Stewart, at Longido; and the 2nd Division, under General Tighe, on the Voi-Maktau line. The enemy strength was estimated at 16,000 men, of whom 2,000 were white — a number slightly less than the army which Smuts now commanded — and its main force was concentrated in the Kilimanjaro region to bar the gates of the north. But since Lettow-Vorbeck had behind him the Tanga Railway and the good roads connecting it with the Central Railway, he was in a position to move troops with speed to the coastal plain, should a landing be threatened there.

Smuts's first task was to decide upon a plan of campaign. Since Britain controlled the sea, it seemed the natural course to force a landing at Tanga and Dar-es-Salaam, and move into the interior along the railway lines. Such a course would give us at once much shorter communications with our bases at Durban and Cape Town, and would enable us to advance to the tableland by the valleys of the many east-flowing rivers. This was undoubtedly the plan which the enemy expected us to adopt, but he had to reckon with a master of the unexpected. Smuts decided to "drive" the country from north to south, while his subsidiary forces, British and Belgian, moved eastward from Lake Victoria, from Lake Kivu, from Tanganyika and Nyasa. It was a plan which at first sight seemed to verge on the impossible. In moving south he had to force the gap of Kilimanjaro, where the Germans were strongly entrenched; he had to cross many rivers and lateral valleys; he had to face three knots of difficult mountain-land; above all, till he won the Tanga Railway, he must have one single precarious line of communications through Voi and Maktau. More: even with the Tanga Railway, even with the Central Railway in his hands,



his position would not be easy, for the enemy might be expected so to destroy these lines that they would take months to repair. Indeed, he could look for no certain additional communications till he found them by water on the Rufiji.

But Smuts had good reason for his decision. His main forces were massed on the northern front, and there was no time before the rains came to alter General Tighe's dispositions. He knew, too, the deadly climate, and he did not wish to subject his men to the fevers of the coastal plain with the rains due in a month's time. So far as possible he hoped to fight on the high lands, or at any rate to have uplands adjacent for rest camps and hospitals. Again, he wished to split the enemy country, as Sherman split the Confederacy by his march through Georgia. If his main force took the central road from north to south, and subsidiary armies pressed in from the west, and in due course detachments landed on the coast and pushed westward, the enemy would be caught, not between two but between a multitude of fires. He knew the difficulty of rounding up a mobile force and clearing a savage country, and he was well aware that it could not be achieved by a stately progress against a fully warned enemy. He wanted a surprise, a series of surprises, for no Fabian strategy could effect his purpose. Therefore he adopted a plan which Lettow-Vorbeck had not dreamed of, and flung himself into the wilds, trusting to good fortune to pick up new communications as he proceeded. It was a plan only possible for a commander who had implicit faith in himself and in his men. "I am sure," he wrote, "it was not possible to conduct the camping successfully in any other way. Hesitation to take risks, slower moves, closer inspection of the auspices, would only have meant the same disappearance of my men from fever and other tropical diseases, without any corresponding compensation to show in the defeat of the enemy and the occupation of his country."

The first step was to force the passage between the flanks of Kilimanjaro and the Pare mountains. Before his arrival General Tighe had done good work in the way of preparation. The 1st Division had occupied Longido and linked it up with the railhead at Lake Magadi, and the 2nd Division had taken Serengeti. The railway from Voi was slowly creeping forward towards Maktau. After a careful reconnaissance Smuts resolved to attack at once, in order to achieve his purpose before the heavy rains began in the end of March. Across the mouth of the gap, between Kilimanjaro and the Pare mountains, ran the river Lumi, joining the Ruwu,



which flowed from Lake Jipe along the northern base of the Pare. On this line the enemy held an apparently impregnable position. Clearly there was no way of turning it on the south, for the Pare cliffs rose sheer from the river. Smuts's plan was to direct the 1st Division, under General Stewart, from Longido across thirty-five miles of waterless bush to the gap between Muer and Kilimanjaro, and thence to the place called Somali Hauser, west of Moschi. They were then to move south-east to Kahe, on the Tanga Railway, in the hope of cutting off the retreat of the enemy in the gap. The 2nd Division, under General Tighe, was to attack in front towards Taveta, assisted on the right by the 1st South African Mounted Brigade, under General Van Deventer.

The 1st Division started at dusk on 5th March, Van Deventer moved out by night on the 7th, and the 2nd Division advanced at dawn on the 8th. After a sharp fight at Salaita hill, the Lumi was crossed and Taveta reached on the 10th. The enemy made a stand in the pass of the Kitowo hills between Latema and Reata, and after a long struggle was driven out by the 2nd Division on the night of the 11th. On the 12th Van Deventer, moving on the skirts of Kilimanjaro, crossed the Himo River, and on the 13th reached New Moschi, the railway terminus. On the 15th he was in Old Moschi, higher up in the hills. On the 14th the 1st Division reached New Moschi, while the 2nd Division held a line from the Latema Pass to the Himo. The enemy's position in the gap had been turned, and he was retreating towards the Ruwu and the Tanga Railway.

The next step was to secure the Ruwu crossings, and to do it in time to intercept the retreat of his main body; but there was much difficult broken country between us and the river. Van Deventer was ordered to march by night and cross the Pangani south of Kahe station, as as to get in rear of the enemy's position, while the 1st Division advanced direct on the Ruwu. By daylight on the 21st Van Deventer was fording the Pangani, and presently had seized Kahe hill. He then occupied the station, while the enemy blew up the railway bridge. This cut off Lettow-Vorbeck's retreat by the railway west of the Pare range, and the only hope for the Germans on the Ruwu was the Lake Jipe route east of the mountains. If the 1st Division, now under General Sheppard, could but ford the Ruwu in time, a comprehensive disaster would follow. At 11.30 a.m. on the 21st Sheppard was pressing forward; but the Germans fought stubborn rearguard actions, and in the thick bush progress was slow. That night the enemy slipped across

the Ruwu, and so secured his retirement by Lake Jipe. On the same day, the 21st, Aruscha, fifty miles west of Moschi, was occupied by a party of Van Deventer's scouts. The pass had been forced, the whole area north of the Ruwu was cleared, and a base in enemy country had been won before the rains for the next move forward. The great mountain, whose chief peak bore the name of the German Emperor, was in our hands. The Commander-in-Chief moved his headquarters to Moschi, and prepared for the second stage.

## II

It was now the end of March, but still the rains tarried. Smuts made all possible haste to improve his communications against the wet weather by pushing on the railway from Voi across the Lumi to link up with the Tanga line. He relied mainly on motor transport, and, once the rains began, that would be useless. He effected a complete reorganization of his command, abolishing the old two divisions and disposing his troops in three divisions — two made up wholly of South African contingents, and one containing the Indian and British forces. Under the new arrangement the 1st Division, under Major-General Hoskins, comprised the 1st East African Brigade, under Brigadier-General Sheppard, and the 2nd East African Brigade, under Brigadier-General Hannington. The 2nd Division, under Major-General Van Deventer, contained the 1st South African Mounted Brigade, under Brigadier-General Manie Botha, and the 3rd South African Infantry Brigade, under Brigadier-General C. A. L. Berrange. The 3rd Division, under Major-General Brits, had the 2nd South African Mounted Brigade, under Brigadier-General Enslin, and the 2nd South African Infantry Brigade, under Brigadier-General Beves.

This done, the Commander-in-Chief considered his next step. Reviewing the various possibilities, he concluded that the main enemy force had retired into the Pare and Usambara mountains, expecting to be followed. He resolved to disappoint them, and to strike at the unguarded interior. He would send Van Deventer with the 2nd Division straight towards Kondoa Irangi, which would compel Lettow-Vorbeck to weaken his force in the mountains on the Tanga line, and enable the other two divisions, he hoped, to conquer the ranges. To this decision he was helped by the fact that the coming rainy season would be worst in the mountain area, and that if he moved swiftly south he need not bring operations to a standstill during April and May. Meantime, he arranged that

the 2,000 British rifles under Lieutenant-Colonel Adye on Lake Victoria, and the large Belgian forces around Lake Kivu, should begin to press in from the western border.

Van Deventer started from Aruscha on 3rd April, and that night captured the hill and wells of Lol Kissale, thirty-five miles to the south. Starting again on the 8th, his horsemen arrived at Tarangire on the 9th, and at Ufiome on the 12th. He was now more than half-way to his goal, but the rains had begun, and progress was difficult. His horses were greatly exhausted, and it was not till the 17th that touch was found with the main enemy position, four miles north of Kondoa Irangi. At noon on the 19th the place fell. It was a magnificent forced march, involving severe privations and immense fatigue. The incessant rain had made cooking impossible; there had been no rations, and the men had lived on scraps of meat and meal, and the animals on mealie stalks and grass. The 2nd Division had come to the end of its tether, and Van Deventer had to wait for remounts before he could move. The most he could do was to push out patrols towards the Central Railway in the south and Handeni in the east. He was cut loose from his base, and had to live on local supplies; which, fortunately, were plentiful, for the Kondoa Irangi plateau was full of cattle and renowned for its fertility. The capture of the place had seriously discomposed the enemy. Lettow-Vorbeck moved a force of 4,000 from the Usambara Mountains by way of Mombo, Morogoro, and Dodoma, and on the 7th of May attacked Van Deventer's 3,000 weary troops from the south. By the 10th the attack had been beaten off, and no further serious offensive was attempted by the German commander. Van Deventer's march to Kondoa Irangi was, strategically, perhaps the most significant episode in the campaign, as it was certainly the most picturesque.

A few days later the 1st and 3rd Divisions began their advance down the Tanga Railway, the first force of the rains having slackened and the ground hardened. Smuts's plan was to move eastward to a point opposite Handeni, and then to swing south against the Central Railway on a line parallel to Van Deventer's. It was essential to move fast, while the enemy was still vainly battling at Kondoa Irangi. There were large German forces in the Pare and Usambara mountains; but Smuts hoped to march down the Pangani (which flows twenty miles south of the hills), and to occupy Handeni before reinforcements could reach it from the west and north. It was a bold plan, for he condemned his main body to move through dense bush with an unfordable river on its right.



In that advance went Sheppard's and Beves's brigades,\* while as flank guards Hannington's brigade of Indian troops moved along the railway just under the hills; and the 3rd King's African Rifles, under Lieutenant-Colonel Fitzgerald, made a circuit north of the Pare range in order to descend on the railway through the Ngulu gap.

Lettow-Vorbeck's *askaris* knew the country well, but we had in our service many old Boer and British hunters who had as much bush lore as any native. These men did brilliant work in that difficult descent of the Pangani valley. Fitzgerald started on 18th May; Hannington's brigade and the main column on the 22nd. On the 25th Hannington had occupied Same station, and next day Fitzgerald joined him through the Ngulu gap. This turned the enemy's first position at Lembini, which was taken by Hoskins without a blow. On the 31st of May Buiko station, where the Pangani and the railway meet, was occupied, and the enemy was in retreat to Mombo, whence ran a trolley line to Handeni. This made it clear that the Germans did not propose to defend the Usambara range, but were retiring by Handeni to the Central Railway. To Hannington was left the task of clearing the near end of those hills, which he did by advancing to Mombo on the 9th of June, occupying Wilhelmstal (the summer seat of the German Government) on the 12th, and reaching Korogwe on the 15th. The main force had meantime crossed to the right bank of the Pangani. Beves's brigade executed a turning movement towards the west by Ssangeni, while Sheppard's brigade on the 19th entered Handeni itself. Next day he was joined by Hannington from Korogwe.

In Handeni we had a second strategic base, parallel to Kondoa Irangi, for our advance on the Central Railway; and now that we held it, the enemy at Kondoa was wholly cut off from the north. Smuts's line of communications was getting very long, for he had not yet opened up another sea base, and rations and comforts were terribly short among his wearied men. But the indefatigable spirit of the Commander-in-Chief was communicated to the army, and he was able to induce them to still further exertions when it seemed that they had already passed the limit of their strength. From a military point of view he was right to press on, for delay might lose him the fruit of his remarkable successes. On the 20th he moved to Kangata, for he heard that the enemy was in position on the Lukigura River. A column under Hoskins

\* General Brits, of the 3rd Division, did not arrive till the end of June.



was dispatched in a flanking movement, while Sheppard attacked in front, and on the 24th the line was won. Here, perforce, a halt must be called. Since 22nd May the troops had marched over 200 miles in desperate country, and the transport system had reached the extreme radius of its capacity. The Nguru range of mountains lay before them, and it appeared that there the enemy was massing in force. Moreover, it was desirable to bring Van Deventer and the 2nd Division farther forward to conform with the advance of the main force, before a combined movement could be undertaken against the Central Railway. Accordingly a big standing camp was formed on the Msiha River, eight miles beyond the Lukigura, and just under the north-east buttress of the Nguru hills.

The enemy had virtually evacuated the Usambara hills, and on 7th July Tanga was occupied, with the help of the Navy, almost without opposition. Small guerilla bands still hung around the Korogwe neighbourhood; but during July the country was cleared by an advance from Tanga and Pangani, and by a movement of Hannington from the south. To complete our hold on the north, Sadani Bay was occupied by our Navy on 1st August, and Bagamoyo on the 15th, and the way was thus prepared for the larger advance on Dar-es-Salaam.

On the western marches the Belgians, under General Tombeur, having moved their base from Kibati, north of Lake Kivu, to Bukakate, on Lake Victoria, had occupied Kigali, the capital of the Ruanda province, and the British "Lake detachment" had taken the island of Ukerewe, in Lake Victoria. Sir Charles Crewe was now appointed to the Lake command, and occupied during June the Bukoba and Karagwe districts of Ruanda. On 14th July he compelled the enemy to evacuate Mwanza, his most important town on the lake, and so won a valuable base for a future movement on Tabora. The readiness with which the enemy gave up this area compelled Smuts to revise his views. He had formerly thought that Tabora would be the goal of Lettow-Vorbeck's retreat; he now reached the conclusion that it would either be south-eastwards to the Rufiji delta, or south to the Mahenge plateau.

### III

The Msiha camp was an uneasy resting-place. The enemy in the mountains to the south kept up a persistent shelling, and the troops had to burrow for shelter into the ground. But the halt

was of real advantage, for it enabled weary units to rest, and allowed them to collect reserves of supplies and to receive reinforcements from South Africa of both guns and infantry. Meanwhile Van Deventer had begun to move on 24th June, in order to come into line with the rest of the army, and to co-operate in reducing the Nguru position. He broke up the enemy's lines south of Kondoa, which had already been weakened by the transference of troops to Nguru. His immediate objective was now the Central Railway; but his advance was so arranged that it should also have a bearing on the Nguru situation, and intercept the main enemy force as they fell back from the hills. On 20th July a column moved westward and occupied Ssingida. On 14th July a column started due south, and after a stiff encounter at Mpondi reached Saranda and Kilimatinde, and so got astride the Central Railway. Van Deventer's main forces advanced to the south-east, the mounted brigade under Manie Botha being diverted on Kikombo, and Ber-range's infantry by way of Njangalo upon Dodoma. Njangalo was reached on 25th July and Kikombo on the 30th. The end of July saw a hundred miles of the Central Railway in our possession, and though every bridge and culvert had been destroyed, the enemy had not had time to do serious damage to the track.

The much-tried 2nd Division had done marvels, but its precarious line of supply from Moschi had now been lengthened by another 100 miles, and its next objective, Kilossa, was a further 120 miles on. Nevertheless, with scarcely a halt, it pushed down the railway. It partially solved its transport problem by narrowing the gauge of its heavy lorries, so that they could run on railway trolley wheels. Mpapua was taken on 12th August, Kidete on the 16th, and Kilossa on the 22nd. During July, too, the Belgians and the British Lake detachment had been steadily drawing near to Tabora. Ujiji and Kigoma, on the shores of Tanganyika, had been occupied, and Ruchugi, on the line to Tabora; while from the north-west a column was approaching St. Michael. General Northey, in the south-west, had taken Malangali, and was moving on Iringa. Lettow-Vorbeck had now but one direction of retreat left to him — the south.

It was time for Smuts's main force to advance and clear the Nguru hills. The mountain region was some fifty miles long from north to south, and about twenty-five miles broad, and had on the north-east a subsidiary feature in the shape of Mount Kanga, between which and the Nguru *massif* the Mdjonga River flowed south to join the Wami. It was a region of narrow wooded defiles,

rushing streams, and tracks winding on the edge of precipices — an ideal country for any defensive. Smuts's plan was to send Sheppard's brigade against the main Kanga position, while Hannington's brigade advanced on its right down the Mdjonga valley on Matamondo and Turiani. Brits's 3rd Division was ordered to fetch a circuit round the north end of the mountains, and close in upon Mdondo from the west. Brits started on 5th August, Hannington on the 6th, and Sheppard on the 7th. Sheppard feinted against the main enemy front at Kanga, but his left wing moved six miles east so as to turn the mountain and come in on the enemy rear at the Russongo River. Enslin, with the mounted troops of Brits's division, occupied Mdondo on the 8th; but reported that the hill roads were impossible for wheeled traffic, with the result that all the transport had to be sent back to the Luki-guru to follow Sheppard. Hannington reached Matamondo on the 9th, where he found himself strongly opposed. Beves's brigade was accordingly sent to support him, and meantime Enslin at Mdondo was threatening the enemy's rear and compelling him to think of retreat.

Had the whole 3rd Division been able to reach Mdondo, the Matamondo force might have been cut off. As it was, after severe fighting on the 10th and 11th, that force fell back, and on the 11th Sheppard reached the Russongo River, to find the enemy gone. He then marched south to Kipera, on the river Wami, while Brits and Hannington reached Turiani. By the 15th Brits and Hannington were clear of the Nguru hills, and on the 18th the whole British force was at Dakawa, at the crossing of the Wami. The enemy was retreating partly on Kilossa, but mainly on Morogoro. On the 22nd, as we have seen, Van Deventer reached Kilossa, so Morogoro became the only refuge.

Smuts had hopes of bringing Lettow-Vorbeck to bay at Morogoro, and denying him retreat to the south. The place, which stands on a tributary of the Ngerengere, was protected from the Dakawa direction by a long line of hills, and had the Uluguru mountains behind it. To force him to fight, Smuts devised an elaborate outflanking plan. Enslin, with the 2nd Mounted Brigade, was to make for the Central Railway at Mkata, to cut off the outlet to the west; while the main force marched south-east, in order to approach Morogoro by way of the Ngerengere valley, and to cut the enemy's retreat to the east by Kiroka. Enslin duly reached Mkata on the 23rd and Mlali on the 24th, where he received in support the 1st Mounted Brigade, now under Brigadier-General



Nussey, from Van Deventer's 2nd Division. Unfortunately there was a track, unknown to us, which led due south from Morogoro through the mountains to Kissaki, and by this way Lettow-Vorbeck escaped. On the 24th we reached the Ngerengere, on the 26th Hannington was at Mkesse, on the east, and the same day Sheppard entered Morogoro. But the enemy had gone, and gone precipitately, to judge by burning storehouses and the railway platform deep in spilt coffee.

Though both men and animals were well-nigh worn out, Smuts pressed hard on his trail. On the 27th Sheppard was in Kiroka, and by the 30th the enemy was behind the little river Ruwu. The struggle for the Uluguru range was one of the hardest in the campaign. Brits's 3rd Division moved on the west side, with Enslin's Mounted Brigade on his left among the hills, while Hoskins's 1st Division took the eastern flank. Lettow-Vorbeck fought stout rearguard actions, excellently supported by the nature of the country. "The road," wrote Smuts, "passes through very difficult broken foothills, covered either with bush or grass growing from six to twelve feet high, through which any progress was slow, painful, and difficult. The bridging of the Ruwu took several days, and for some distance beyond the road passes along the face of precipitous rocks round which the enemy had constructed a gallery on piles to afford a track for his transport. As the gallery would not carry our mechanical transport, it took us some days to blast away the mountain side and construct a proper road." Tulo was not reached till 10th September, and Hannington, who led the vanguard, drove the enemy south of the Mgeta River on the 13th. It was clear, from the heavy gun ammunition left behind, that Lettow-Vorbeck had contemplated an elaborate defence of the Uluguru range; but the speed of the 1st Division, and the unexpected appearance of Enslin's troops at Mlali, had forced him to change his plans. Brits and Enslin followed the elephant track by Mahalaka which Speke and Burton had taken in 1857. On the 5th of September they were close on Kissaki, and it was decided to attack the place with Beves's infantry brigade, Enslin's mounted brigade of the 3rd Division, and Nussey's mounted brigade of the 2nd Division, which had been lent to Brits. The attack failed, because it was badly timed, the three units did not act together, and the thick bush prevented assistance being sent from one to the other. It was not till the 15th of September that, Hannington having taken Dutumi, eighteen miles to the east, Enslin managed to outflank the position and threaten the retreat to



the Rufiji. The enemy fell back on a defensive line along the Mgeta River.

During this period of hard fighting astride the Central Railway, the situation on the coast was being rapidly improved. Brigadier-General Edwards, the Inspector-General of Communications, moved south from Bagamoyo with two columns, one along the Ruwu River towards the Central Railway, and the other direct on Dar-es-Salaam. British warships appeared off the coast, and on 3rd September the German capital surrendered. The time had now come to occupy the whole coast, so, with the assistance of the Navy, Mikindani was seized on 13th September, Sudi Bay on the 15th, Lindi on the 16th, and Kilwa and Kilwa Kisiwani on the 7th. Kilwa was an important base, and a strong column was landed there for operations along the Matandu River and in the Mtumbi mountains. Dar-es-Salaam was also a vital centre, and from it the work of restoring the eastern end of the railway, most comprehensively wrecked by the Germans, was carried on. Between the sea and Kilossa our Pioneer Corps had to rebuild no less than sixty bridges.

At the same time Van Deventer was not idle. On 28th August he had taken Uleia, and by 3rd September was at Kikumi. On the 10th he was at Kidodi, on the Great Ruaha River, where he found the enemy in position. General Northey, too, had occupied Lupembe on 19th August and Iringa on the 29th, and was moving upon the Mahenge plateau from the west; while on the south he had taken Ssongea, eighteen miles east of Wiedhafen, on Lake Nyasa. Farther north Sir Charles Crewe and General Tombeur were converging on Tabora, which was entered by the Belgians on 19th September. The German garrison there fell back towards the upper waters of the Great Ruaha, where they had to face both Van Deventer and Northey.

One other episode remains to be mentioned. On March 9, 1916, Portugal, the oldest ally of Britain, had declared war on Germany. Her main military effort was to be on the Flanders front, where presently she had two divisions in line with the British. But since her colony of Mozambique bordered German East Africa on the south, she played some small part also in this campaign. Her troops, under General Gil, crossed the frontier, the Rovuma River, and occupied various points on its northern shore. As it was evident that Lettow-Vorbeck's retreat would be to the southward, the Portuguese forces must sooner or later come into action.

The position at the end of September was that in little more

than six months the German hold on East Africa had been narrowed down to the area between the Rufiji and Mgeta Rivers in the north-east, and the Great Ruaha and Ulanga Rivers in the south-west. Outside this area the enemy's only troops were the Tabora garrison, now making its painful way eastward, and a small detachment between Dar-es-Salaam and the Rufiji. With the exception of the Mahenge plateau, he had lost every healthy district of the colony. He was dwelling now in fever swamps, while the bulk of our troops were on higher ground. But Smuts's gallant forces were woefully exhausted, and far from comfortable in the way of supplies. The fighting front was fed from the railhead at Korogwe, west of Tanga, and everything had to be brought 300 miles by hill paths and bush tracks. Often the ration problem became acute. At Kissaki, for example, a sudden storm of rain destroyed the roads, and for a fortnight our troops there lived off native millet and the flesh of hippos shot in the Mgeta River. Tsetse fly had played havoc with our transport animals, and large numbers of men were down with malaria. The 3rd Division had to be sent back to Morogoro to recover strength; and though we harassed the enemy on the Mgeta line, major operations were for the time being at an end.

#### IV

The rest of the campaign, it was evident, would be in an unhealthy country, and it was necessary to have medical reports on the fitness of the troops. As a result, 12,000 men were sent back to South Africa as unfit for further campaigning. By way of reinforcements, the one British regular battalion (Loyal North Lancashires) returned from the Cape at full strength, and the Nigerian Brigade, under Brigadier-General Cunliffe, arrived in November. It was calculated that by the end of the year the worst part of the transport difficulties would be overcome by the opening of the Central Railway for traffic between Dar-es-Salaam and Dodoma. The enemy's main force lay facing us north of the Rufiji, and if compelled to retire, he must fall back either on Mahenge or into Portuguese territory. To force the crossing of the Rufiji was no light task, for it was more than a quarter of a mile wide. Smuts's aim was to cut off the Rufiji force from Mahenge, and at the same time prevent its retirement to the south. Accordingly, he established a base at Kilwa, on the coast, from which columns could work north and north-west. He hoped to cross the Rufiji

somewhere well to the west of Kibambawe, in order to bar the road to Mahenge and then join hands with the Kilwa column, so as to close in on the enemy's rear.

General Hannington yielded up the command of the 2nd East African Brigade to Colonel O'Grady, and took over the Kilwa force, which was now called the 3rd East African Brigade. There were other changes. The 3rd Division was disbanded, the Lake detachment ceased to exist, Van Deventer's command was re-organized, and reinforcements were sent to Northey. The situation in the area of the last-named during October became interesting, for the Tabora garrison succeeded in breaking through and cutting the communications between Northey's main body and the Iringa troops. A small British post at Ngominji was surrounded and taken prisoner. There were various minor actions at Madibira, Malingali, and Lupembe, in which the enemy lost heavily. In November Smuts visited that area, and instructed Van Deventer to base himself on Iringa and Northey on Lupembe, and between them force the enemy beyond the Ruhudje and Ulanga Rivers. Meantime Hannington at Kilwa had done good work in clearing the Matandu valley and the southern slopes of the Mtumbi mountains. In November the whole 1st Division, less Sheppard's brigade, was transferred to Kilwa, with General Hoskins in command. There during December there was a good deal of fighting, but by the close of the year Hoskins felt himself in a position to advance towards the lower Rufiji when our main forces should attack. Meantime the Portuguese were driven off the north bank of the Rovuma, and it was clear that if Lettow-Vorbeck broke out in that direction he would meet with no serious opposition.

The great advance was ordered for New Year's Day, 1917. The plan of it was that Beves's brigade should move to the west and cross the Rufiji just below its junction with the Ruaha, and that Sheppard and Cunliffe should make a similar flanking movement on the east. The vital part was that of Beves. On the night of the 2nd he was only twelve miles from the great river, and at dawn on the 3rd had crossed and established a bridgehead on the southern bank. On the 5th Sheppard, after hard fighting, in which the most famous of African hunters, Captain F. C. Selous, fell at the head of his company, reached Kibambawe, to find that the enemy had crossed, afterwards destroying the bridge. That night he managed to effect a crossing a little higher up, in the course of which he had to deal with some truculent hippos, and next night the passage was continued till the 30th Punjabis were established



on the south shore. Beves meanwhile was making good his hold as far as Luhembero, and Cunliffe's brigade was ordered to follow him. The enemy had been completely outmanœuvred, and with few casualties we had won the Rufiji crossing.

The situation now was that the Tabora garrison had slipped away from both Northey and Van Deventer, and was making for Mahenge, while Lettow-Vorbeck had got across the Rufiji without being forced to action. It showed the impossibility of surrounding an enemy in such country; he could be driven back, but not brought to a standstill. Meantime Hoskins's force from Kilwa was steadily advancing to the north-west. Smuts, reviewing the situation, saw that between Cunliffe on the Rufiji and Hannington at Ngarambi there was a gap of some forty miles, the only outlet through which the enemy could escape. If the two could join hands at Lugaliro the trap might be closed. Failing such a success, there must be a converging movement from the Rufiji and Kilwa upon Liwale in the south.

But Smuts was not suffered to conclude the campaign which he had devised. He was summoned to England to the Imperial War Conference, and left Dar-es-Salaam on the 26th of January.

## V

The new Commander-in-Chief was Lieutenant-General Hoskins, formerly of the 1st Division. With his accession to command the campaign took on a new phase. The main problem had been solved; the country had been virtually conquered; all the chief centres were in our hands; the worst transport difficulties had been surmounted; and the enemy had become a hunted remnant. But the colony was not yet cleared, and it was to take many weary months before the last man of Lettow-Vorbeck's following crossed the Rovuma. The difficulty now was that, with the exception of Mahenge, there were no such strategical objectives as had been offered by Moschi, Tabora, or Dar-es-Salaam. The campaign had become a man-hunt, a chase of a new De Wet, with difficulties before it which no British commander had dreamed of in 1902.

The operations of 1917 may be briefly summarized. During January the central forces advanced east and south from the Rufiji, where the enemy fought stubborn rearguard actions, while the Kilwa force pushed west into the Rufiji delta from Mohoro, and Northey drove the enemy from the high ground east of Lupembe. The situation remained unchanged during the rains—the longest



and heaviest ever known in that country — save that under our pressure there was a steady trickling of German troops southwards both from the Rufiji and Mahenge. In the beginning of May the enemy was in two main bodies — one between 4,000 and 5,000 strong, under Lettow-Vorbeck himself, in the Matandu valley, to which had been added the troops driven out of the Rufiji delta; and one under Tafel, some 2,000 or 3,000 strong, based on Mahenge. Occasionally, and especially in the west, oddments broke back northward, and these were pursued and accounted for by our mounted men. One isolated party, foraging in search of food, had reached Portuguese territory; and one large body, 600 strong, under a certain Naumann, gave trouble north of the Central Railway, and was not disposed of till October. These latter raiders covered in their travels about 2,000 miles, having started from the Nyasa neighborhood in February, and passed through Itunda, crossing the railway east of Tabora in May. They had a brush with the Belgians east of Lake Victoria, and then visited in turn Lake Magadi, Kondoa Irangi, Handeni, and Moschi, being finally brought to bay in the middle of the Massai steppe. Naumann may have been a brute, but his enterprise was a bold one. "Such a raid," wrote General Van Deventer, "could perhaps only have been carried out in a country like German East Africa, where the bush is often so thick that two considerable forces may pass within a mile unaware of each other's presence, and where a ruthless leader of a small force can nearly always live on the country."

Hoskins had reorganized his forces on sound principles, when at the end of May Van Deventer took over from him the supreme command. The latter in person led the main army against Lettow-Vorbeck's eastern force; while Northey, with the assistance of a Belgian contingent, closed in on Tafel's western force in the Mahenge area, shepherding northwards the bands that were making for Portuguese Nyasaland. In July there was hard fighting in the Kilwa district, and Lettow-Vorbeck was slowly driven south from the Matandu River towards Lindi. Early in October the Belgians occupied the Mahenge plateau, and moved southward in touch with our troops advancing from the west. The doom of Tafel's western detachment was now assured. He tried to join hands with Lettow-Vorbeck by going east through the wild country north of the Rovuma; but on 26th November discovered that his way was barred. He attempted to break back, failed, and on 28th November surrendered unconditionally. By the beginning of the same month Lettow-Vorbeck was driven south-west of Lindi. There was no



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other course before him but precipitate flight, and, moving with great speed, he reached the Rovuma, where the Portuguese posts were of no avail to hold him. With some 2,000 men he crossed the river on 25th and 26th November, and the colony of German East Africa was clear of its former masters.

The ten months since Smuts's departure had been no less a trial of fortitude than the ten months of his command. The weather had been bad, sickness was rife, and "a brigade which could put 1,400 rifles into the firing-line considered itself singularly fortunate." Between May and November the British casualties in action alone had been close on 6,000; but, to set against these, 1,618 Germans and 5,482 natives had been killed or captured. It had been a bitter struggle, and before it ceased nine-tenths of the enemy's white and black *personnel* had either perished or been taken prisoner. "My predecessors," wrote Van Deventer, "have well described the difficulties of advancing through tropical Africa against an enemy in possession of interior lines who can advance and retire along carefully prepared lines of supply. As the area of operations diminished, so the potential advantages of these interior lines increased, and the fiercer became the fighting. The *moral* of the enemy never wavered, and nothing but the determined gallantry and endurance of our troops finally crushed him. To the infantry — British, South African, Indian, West and East African — I owe unqualified thanks and praise, and especially to the regimental officers, who set an example which all have followed."\*

## VI

The campaign in German East Africa must rank as unique among the operations of the Great War. It was the boldest "drive" ever undertaken in modern warfare, having regard both to the size of the country and the intricacy of its configuration. In it the fantastic was of daily occurrence. Outposts driven in by lions, river crossings confused by nervous hippos, engagements with the enemy disorganized by impartial attacks of rhinos against both sides — where else could such incidents be found? It was a blending of the hoar-ancient and the ultra-modern — airplanes, barbed wire, and machine guns, with the staked pit which had been the device of neolithic man. And as a background it had the

\* Lettow-Vorbeck held out in Portuguese territory till the Armistice, when he surrendered to Van Deventer. His force was by that time reduced to 154 Europeans and 1,156 *askaris*, and his casualties had for some time been 10 per cent. per month.



brooding terrors of the equatorial climate, death lurking in pool and swamp, in arid bush and ferny ravine, on mountain lawn and in lush valley.

From the military point of view it was a remarkable performance, and the credit belonged to both combatants. The young staff officer from Posen showed a true genius for war, far greater than that of many belauded German generals in Europe. He played what cards he possessed with masterly skill, a supreme patience, and a reasonable chivalry.\* On the British side the task was akin to that in South-West Africa and in the Cameroons, but harder inasmuch as the country was larger and more inaccessible and the enemy better prepared. No campaign in tropical lands in British history had offered so difficult a problem, for in none had the enemy possessed such highly-trained European officers. In transport difficulties alone it outdistanced all our former expeditions on the Indian border, in West Africa, or on the Nile. Indeed, it combined the difficulties both of a civilized and a savage war. We had to face modern weapons and modern strategy; but a decision could not be secured merely by defeating the enemy, for he could fade away into dim forests, and find shelter in the ancient inorganic barbarism of the land.

The chief credit belongs to General Smuts, and one principal reason of his success was that he put his whole soul into it, that he treated it as a major operation of the first importance, and was as resolute to complete the work as if the war had been confined to that one area. Without his fiery energy, his far-reaching strategical grasp, and his quick imagination, we should speedily have reached a stalemate; and in two years, instead of clearing the country, have advanced perhaps to the Wami, perhaps only to the Pangani. He combined all our assets and all our far-flung detachments in one closely-wrought strategical plan. He did more, for he inspired his whole command with his own magnetic spirit, and lifted it over hard places which might well have proved unconquerable without such leadership. He was the soul and brain of the army he led, and though in men like Van Deventer and Hoskins, Northey and Hannington, he had most able lieutenants, it was his shaping and controlling mind which made victory certain.

Yet he could not have succeeded but for the quality of his army. Its trials were of a kind to sap the courage of most men.

\* Each side testified to the good conduct of the other. See Sir J. L. Van Deventer's last dispatch of April 26, 1919, and Lettow-Vorbeck's *My Reminiscences of East Africa* (Eng. trans., 1920).

Poor food, excessive fatigue, and constant sickness are the hardest foes for humanity to strive with, and all who are familiar with tropical Africa know the deadly lassitude which infects the blood of Europeans and takes the edge from their spirit. In two months during the autumn of 1916 the wastage of animals was: horses, 10,000; mules, 10,000; oxen, 11,000; donkeys, 2,500. In one week of the same period there were 9,000 patients in hospital, 4,000 of them white men, and over 200 officers. Let the reader reflect what such a handicap meant for military operations, and then assess the credit for those swift marches which flung the enemy from position after position, and tore river lines from his grasp before he was aware of the menace. It was a war on both sides of picked men, black and white. The Angoni of the King's African Rifles, the Manyema of the Belgians, the Wanyamwezi of the Germans, were the military *élite* of Central Africa. We had behind us famous Indian battalions; corps of settlers accustomed to fend for themselves in the wilds; scouts and hunters who had long made a dwelling in the bush; the same type of South African infantryman who in France had fought at Delville Wood and Arras; and those mounted Boers whose quality we knew well, and who among natives who had never seen a horse won a legendary fame as the "Kabure" — a new animal generated by the war. Their heroism and endurance were not fruitlessly expended, for, far as East Africa seemed removed from the strategical centre of gravity, the difficulty of its conquest showed, in General Smuts's words, what an "immense tropical territory, with almost unlimited economic and military possibilities, and provided with excellent submarine bases," might become as an aid to that world empire of which Germany dreamed. And it strengthened the Allies in the resolution that "a land where so many of our heroes lost their lives or their health — where, under the most terrible and exacting conditions, human loyalty and human sacrifice were poured out so lavishly in a great cause — should never be allowed to become a menace to the future peaceful development of the world."

## CHAPTER XC

### THE EXTREMITY OF RUSSIA

*November 8, 1917—March 5, 1918*

The Bolshevik Political Creed — Armistice with Germany — The Brest Litovsk Conference — The Position of the Baltic States — Poland — The Ukraine — Finland — Rumania — The Farce of the Constituent Assembly — Trotski's Hesitations — The Brest Litovsk Treaty — The Gains of the Central Powers — The Bolshevik Performance — The Czecho-Slovaks.

ON the 8th of November the Bolsheviks had seized the reins of government, and on that date Lenin proposed a three months' armistice to all the belligerent Powers. The next day was devoted to a tour round the various administrative departments, which for the most part had been deserted by their officials, and the installation of a new and wholly untrained bureaucracy. On the 10th a batch of decrees transferred the possession of all factories to the operatives, empowered municipalities to sequester house property, and abolished private ownership in land. An attempt of the Railwaymen's Federation to bring about a coalition government failed signally, for the little group of the Smolny Institute refused to share their power with any colleagues. Presently all newspapers not of the Bolshevik persuasion were suppressed, and private stocks of paper and printing-presses confiscated. On the 22nd Colonel Muraviev, an ex-regular officer with a black record, who now commanded the Petrograd district, issued an order announcing that the war was over, and providing for the disbanding of troops. On the 28th the German Command in the East agreed to negotiate for an armistice. The Bolsheviks were now firmly in the saddle, and had started on their wild ride.

On what forces could they count for support? The first and most important was the soviets of the towns. To the average Russian local government was the only form he understood, and

the soviet system, patchy as it was everywhere and infamous in many places, met undoubtedly with a real popular acceptance. The system had no necessary connection with Bolshevism; it was simply a method of government by franchise based upon the voter's occupation in life, a method which did not follow the ordinary parliamentary system of the Western democracies.\* But since it was not based on rule by the will of the majority, it could be manipulated by an energetic fraction, and was now in fact controlled by the Bolsheviks, as every institution in such a crisis will be controlled by its most extreme elements. The system was not universal. In Siberia it was weak; in Finland, the Ukraine, and the Caucasus it had to struggle with nationalist movements; and in the Cossack country it had scarcely begun. The Bolshevik writ, at this stage, did not run generally save in northern and central European Russia. The second support was the universal desire of the people for peace, a desire on which Lenin at once took action. The third was the craving for that land reform which Kerenski had promised but never enforced. The Bolshevik objection to private ownership was not yet realized by the peasants, though their delegates to the peasant soviets stood out strenuously against the new usurpation till it was clear that their opposition was hopeless. Last may be reckoned the widespread unsettlement of the Revolution, the passion for change, for anything provided it was novel, the dream of a new world which could only come into being after the complete destruction of the old. Let it be added that the men of Smolny were not yet compromised by failure, and that they had for the moment no serious opponents. The old Provisional Government and Kerenski had faded away in effectiveness. No party, from the Social Revolutionaries to the Cadets, had real leaders, or knew what it wanted. The Army chiefs were now without armies. The Cossacks of the Don and the Urals were not the stuff to restore an old *régime*, nor was their *hetman*, Kaledin, a Duke of Albemarle.

\* The soviet principle has many points of resemblance to that "constitutionalism" which in the nineteenth century used to be opposed to plebiscitary democracy, and of which the House of Lords and the separate representation of universities in the House of Commons may be considered relics. Disraeli's Reform Bill of 1859 was of that school, and the pure milk of the soviet word may be found in the discussion on the Franchise Bills of 1866-7. For example, Sir Hugh Cairns: "Parliament must be a mirror—a representation of every class, not according to heads, not according to numbers, but according to everything which gives weight and importance in the world without, so that the various classes of this country may be heard, and their views expressed fairly in the House of Commons, without the probability of any one class outnumbering and reducing to silence all the other classes in the kingdom."—*Life of Lord Salisbury*, I., 196.



The new government was a gamble of supreme audacity. The Bolsheviks had no disciplined military force behind them, save what they could themselves create, and they had the Germans at their door. The railways were in chaos, the rich coal and iron basin of the Donetz was in unfriendly hands, and it was hard to see how the people could be fed or kept in employment. The treasury was empty, and they had vast commitments to meet. Under such conditions they could not hope to endure even for a few months except by a crescendo of violent deeds. Since there was no income they must live upon capital — the gold reserve and private bank balances — and they must keep their followers in good heart by something not distinguishable from loot. Like a drunken man, they could only keep erect while they moved fast, for if they went slowly they would fall. To enforce their mandates, they enlisted *condottieri* from the gutters, the Red Guards, in whose ranks many miscreants found good pay and a life of license, and who formed a bodyguard for the Government that ensured them a living. It was mad and chaotic, but it was not purposeless. Lenin and Trotski sought to bring about a world-wide revolution; to annihilate everywhere the *bourgeoisie* and the intellectuals, and to establish a proletariat tyranny. Chaos was their object, the chaos and destruction of the normal state. They did not drift, but, to begin with at any rate, strode with firm steps into what the majority of mankind would call the mire. They knew their own mind with complete precision.

We have already examined the theoretic equipment of that mind; we have now to consider briefly the translation of general dogmas into a working code of policy. The Russian Revolution, which began with a *coup d'état*, had become a revolution in very truth, involving the utter collapse of the old system of government, and the release of elemental forces which were for the time being only destructive. It had not been organized under the inspiration of a formative creed, and there was no scheme in the heads of its makers to replace what they had destroyed. This was made plain by the behaviour first of the Provisional Government and then of Kerenski. They acted as if liberty were in itself a cure for all ills; they aimed at releasing rather than at governing. With such a negative attitude no constructive policy was likely to be either framed or enforced. Those who saw the need of government could only hark back to fragments of the old order, and these were unacceptable to a people drunk with novelties. Nor must it be forgotten that a class war of a sort had been proclaimed

from the very beginning ; even the moderate Social Revolutionaries were committed to it ; whatever their leaders might say, the whole trend of their thought was towards the domination by peasants and workmen of the classes who had hitherto ruled the land. The under dog was to come to his own, and since the vast majority of the Russian people were under dogs, the sudden mass-consciousness swept even sober men off their feet. Though here and there a thinker entered a *caveat* against jerry-built millenniums, he found no hearers. Lenin did not invent the class war ; he did not even inaugurate it as a policy in Russia ; he found it the incoherent creed of the nation, including the bulk of his nominal opponents.

We can picture the Bolshevik leaders slipping back to Russia in the spring of 1917 from foreign soil, where for years they had lived on a diet of futile political discussion varied by hopeless dreams. Suddenly their dreams had come true. They found the situation they had not dared to think of, and a nation hanging on their words. They were in no sense democrats ; the great doctrines of that polity — liberty, brotherhood, and an equal law — signified nothing to them. They were class maniacs, and, in their own eyes, class martyrs, and the time for their revenge had come. Having lived so long among abstractions, reality was distorted for them ; and, having thought only in negations, they had neither the wish nor the power to construct. Their long sojourn in the underworld had deprived them of the chance of serious political education, as much as the most illiterate mujik. They owed nothing to the West, and why should they ? They did not admire its traditions or accept its precepts. They found Russia, like a man of a gross habit of body, suffering from a sharp fever. Themselves consumed with a worse fever, they sought not to lower the patient's temperature, but to infect him with a wilder virus, and, through him, the whole of mankind. Therefore, once they were given the chance, they were certain to act, and to act swiftly. They would make the class war not an aspiration but a fact. They would liberate not only from the last shackles of Tsardom, but from that tumid constitutionalism which the pedants of the West misnamed democracy.

Their intellectual baggage was of the flimsiest, but it is possible to characterise some of the pieces. In the choice of certain of the less important they did not show their usual logic and consistency. They preached, for example, universal self-determination, but they did not believe in it ; for self-determination carried to an extreme means anarchy and particularism run mad ; and in the interests of their class war they were not prepared to allow irrelevant cross-

divisions. As soon as the Ukraine and Finland proposed to set up independent governments, the Bolsheviks showed themselves the most rigid of centralists. But on the main matter they were not in doubt. Their cardinal tenet was the class war, their main watchword Karl Marx's historic appeal: "Workers of the world, unite; you have a world to win, and nothing to lose but your chains." It was this intense concentration that gave their creed not an intellectual but an emotional coherence. As pacifists, they brought not peace but a sword; as liberators, they would enslave all but a single class; as levellers, they sought to establish a reversed tyranny, a shabby oligarchy from the pavement. This obsession mastered alike the cold fanaticism of Lenin, the mild utopianism of Tchicherin, and the more supple talents of Jewish adventurers like Trotsky and Radek. They wished to break down as much as possible of the old world in the time permitted to them, and to kindle a fire from the debris which would send sparks to the four corners of the globe. They were in the true sense adventurers, making hay with a desperate zeal while their sun shone, and in fever-stricken Russia they found a popular mood which gave them their opportunity.

The creed was almost as ancient as human society, and there was nothing to distinguish the movement from a thousand others scattered like wrack about the sea of history, save the remarkable personality of its leader and the unique chance afforded him by a disorganized society and an ignorant, weary, and nerveless people. To some minds the ideal world of Communism may seem a thing of beauty, to others a horror of darkness; to one man the Marxian economics on which it is based may have the truth of mathematical science, to another they may appear a self-contradictory folly; one moralist may see in the creed an ennobling, another a degradation, of human nature. To the historian the cardinal fact is that such attempts have often been made and have never succeeded, since there seems to be that in the soul of man which is impatient of a society so monotonous and of an ordering of life so arbitrary and sterile. If he views in this light the Communist ideal he must suspect still more deeply the Communist methods. The Bolshevik sought to make the world a clean slate on which he could write what he pleased, forgetting that nature does not tolerate such convulsions. To that organic thing called human society he applied his crude violence, and the result was a new way not of life but of death.

In the ranks of Bolshevism were many agents of Germany,



some of whom had been in the Russian Secret Police in the old days, scoundrels who would sell their souls willingly for hire. But, though the leaders were unscrupulous enough in their methods, and would pocket German gold if it helped their purpose, they had their own game to play, and had small affection for *Deutschtum* in itself. Yet Prussianism and Bolshevism were nearly related. Both unduly simplified the world, both were without sense of history, both would substitute for the rich and organic variousness of life a harsh mechanism. The inspiration of both was Central European. Each was a devotee of *Machtpolitik*; each sought, in defiance of right and justice, to impose its theories on the world by force. "It is to be observed," said Trotski later at Brest Litovsk, "that the Russian Government is based upon power. Throughout the whole of history no other government has been known. So long as society consists of contending classes, the power of government will be based on strength, and these governments will maintain their dominion by force." It is Prussianism's authentic voice.

It should be realized that Lenin and his colleagues were not anarchists in the common sense of the word, though they succeeded in producing anarchy. They aimed at establishing a strong, rigid, and narrow government, of whose rules they would tolerate no breach. They did not form the extremest left of the Revolution, for there was an extremer section than they, who aimed at a world of complete individual license. Against these Lenin was forever inveighing, as foes of society. They were his enemies on the one side; on the other were ranged the more moderate socialists under leaders like Tchernov, who appealed to the peasantry as the Bolsheviks appealed to the workmen of the towns; the Centre parties, supported by the bourgeoisie and the *intelligentsia*, but without leaders, for Miliukov was more a schoolmaster than a statesman; the Cossacks, self-centred, scattered and unreliable; the nationalists of Finland, the Ukraine, and the Caucasus; the Orthodox Church and its hierarchy; the loyal elements of the Army, every day declining in number; and somewhere in the darkness those who still dreamed of a monarchical restoration. The true Bolsheviks were only a small fraction of the Russian people—a hundred thousand or so among 170 millions; but they were united and purposeful, while their foes were impotent and divided, and they preached a creed of which the main tenets appealed to the fatigue and ignorance of the ordinary man, though he would have rejected the whole body of doctrine had he understood it. The



Army chiefs were off the immediate stage—Kornilov under arrest, Kaledin among his Cossacks, Alexeiev and Denikin and Brussilov in retirement. Kerenski had disappeared, and Savinkov, a far more dangerous antagonist, had returned to that underworld of whose intricacies he was a master.

The Bolsheviks' first task was to stop the war. They had already destroyed the Russian Army; they must now destroy all other armies by appealing to the blind masses behind them. They were pacifists of the most militant brand, for they sought peace not by submitting to the will of a conqueror, but by using negotiations as a means of propaganda among the conqueror's own troops and throughout the world. If only they could awake their feverish class mania in Germany, they would win from their apparent abasement a lasting triumph. Hence the history of the Bolshevik régime is to be found in its foreign policy. Till the end of the year there were few outstanding events in the chaos of their domestic government. On 4th December Dukhonin, the former commander-in-chief, was barbarously murdered at army headquarters. From the 9th onward, when Kaledin took the field in the Don region, where he was presently joined by Kornilov, there was constant fighting around Kharkov and Rostov between his Cossacks and the Red Guards, the latter having the support of sailors from the Black Sea Fleet. The 11th was the day fixed originally for the meeting of the Constituent Assembly, but nothing happened. The meeting was postponed, for the way in which the elections had gone did not satisfy the junta at Smolny. But these events were of small importance compared to what was happening inside the German lines.

On 28th November, as we have seen, Germany accepted the Bolshevik scheme for an armistice, and Count Hertling in the Reichstag announced that his Government agreed to the Russian proposals as a basis of discussion. On 2nd December hostilities ceased on the Eastern front, and fraternization began. The Allies formally protested, and Trotski seized the occasion to deliver an inflammatory speech denouncing foreign interference. On the 3rd a Russian deputation arrived at the headquarters of Prince Leopold of Bavaria at Brest Litovsk. On the 5th a preliminary conference opened there, with General Hoffmann, Prince Leopold's Chief of Staff, presiding, in the presence of representatives from Germany, Austria-Hungary, Turkey, and Bulgaria. The Russian delegates were a peasant, a private soldier, a sailor, and one or two

Bolshevik politicians, accompanied by several minor staff officers to act as expert advisers. One of the latter, General Skalon, committed suicide in despair during the conference. How preposterous was the whole delegation may be judged from the fact that one Russian member was an official of the old Tsarist Secret Police and a German agent. They asked for the retirement of the German detachments from the islands in the Gulf of Riga, and the promise that, while negotiations continued, no German forces would be sent from the East to other battle-grounds.\* They pressed, too, for an armistice on all fronts alike. The German delegates refused these demands, and for some days there was an indeterminate discussion. Finally, on 15th December, an armistice agreement was signed, providing for a truce on the Eastern front for twenty-eight days from noon on 17th December. The Germans agreed in the meantime to transfer no troops westward, but did not scruple to break their word.†

Meantime the Rumanian army, now in an impossible position, had been forced by the defection of its Russian contingent to join in the truce as from 6th December. That day Trotsky, as the Bolshevik Commissioner for Foreign Affairs, issued a Note to the Allies declaring that the coming armistice offered them a *locus pœnitentiæ* as to war aims. "The period is, even for the present disturbed state of international communications, amply sufficient to afford the Allied Governments the opportunity to define their attitude towards the peace negotiations — that is, their willingness or their refusal to take part in the negotiations for an armistice and peace. In the case of a refusal they must declare clearly and deliberately before all mankind the aims for which the peoples of Europe may have to shed their blood during a fourth year of war." It was a suggestion which no Allied Government could accept. To negotiate with an undefeated and impenitent Germany would have been to disown the cause for which they had entered the war. But for Germany herself the occasion came as a god-send, for she began the game with every card in her hand. To the doctrinaires of Bolshevism, who would waste hours hunting for metaphysical formulas, she could oppose trained diplomats with a policy and a purpose. At the worst she could secure stagnation

\* Lenin opposed this condition on the ground that he knew a more effective way of preventing the militarist Powers using the armistice to attain their own ends. This was apparently the non-recognition of foreign loans, and the engineering of a universal revolution, which he believed to be possible at once.

† Six divisions were moved to France and Flanders between 16th and 31st December.

on her Eastern front, and thereby change the whole orientation of the war. At the best she might throw an apple of discord into all the councils of her enemies. Her danger was that she might overrate the simplicity of the game, and play too blindly for present advantage. As for the dreamers of Smolny, they were swollen with vainglory. By the sheer might of intellect they would force a settlement upon the world, a settlement which would not only put an end to an irrelevant war, but would leave them with a mighty vantage ground for reshaping human society according to their pet pattern. They were wildly in error; yet it is probable that history will put the worst blunder to the credit not of the crude theorists of Petrograd, but of the cool and calculating politicians of Berlin.

The Brest Litovsk meeting to discuss terms of peace was formally opened on Saturday, 22nd December. Among the obscure Russian delegates only the names of Joffe and Kamenev were known to the world. Germany sent Kuhlmann, her Foreign Secretary, one of the most astute of the lesser statesmen of Europe; and from Austria-Hungary came Count Czernin, who was of the Kuhlmann school, and combined a minimum of practical liberalism with a maximum of democratic profession. The attitude of both may be judged from Kuhlmann's preliminary declaration: "Our negotiations will be guided by a spirit of placable humanity and mutual esteem. They must take into account what is an accomplished historical fact, in order not to lose our footing on the firm ground of reality, but on the other hand they must be inspired by the new great dominant motive that has brought us together. I regard it as an auspicious circumstance that our negotiations begin in sight of that Christmas festival which for many centuries past has promised peace upon earth and goodwill to men." That is to say, Germany, as conqueror, was not prepared to give up any material conquest, but she was ready to satisfy the Bolsheviks by every pious declaration which sounded bravely and signified nothing. For behind Czernin and Kuhlmann stood the massive figure of Ludendorff, who sought only to use this fortunate rabblement in Russia for his great projects on the Western front.

If such an attitude held out little hope of satisfactory results, the Bolsheviks were no less uncompromising. Their heads were turned by what they considered their success in the first round. "We did not overthrow the Tsar," said Trotsky in Petrograd on the opening day of the Conference, "in order to fall on our knees before the Kaiser and beg for peace. . . . We summon all to a



holy war against imperialism in every country. If owing to our economic ruin we are unable to fight, and are obliged to renounce the struggle for our ideals, we will tell our foreign comrades that that struggle is not ended but only postponed." In his eyes Brest Litovsk was an occasion less for diplomacy than for propaganda. And meantime, to the embarrassment of Germany, his agents were scattering their appeals everywhere among the inactive German troops on the now stagnant front. The Bolsheviks at this period were true to their anti-militarist ideals. They fought not for their own power only, but for the triumph of their creed in any land to which they could gain access. Trotski had small reason to love Britain, having spent some time in a Canadian internment camp, but at the moment he was little better disposed towards Germany.

The scene in the Council Chamber at Brest Litovsk was worthy of the art of some great historical painter. On one side sat the bland and alert representatives of the Central Powers, black-coated or much beribboned and bestarred, exquisitely polite, but blundering often in giving a needless "von" to some Russian Jew or the title of "Excellency" to some shaggy comrade from Smolny. Among them could be noted the narrow face and alert eyes of Kuhlmann, whose courtesy in debate never failed; the handsome presence of Czernin, who was put up to fly the wilder sort of kite, because of his artless *bonhomie*; and the chubby Pickwickian countenance of General Hoffmann, who now and then grew scarlet and combative when he felt that some military pronouncement was called for. Behind the Teutonic delegates was an immense band of staff officers and civil servants and spectacled professorial experts. Each delegation used its own tongue, and the discussions were apt to be lengthy. Opposite the ranks of Teutondom sat the Russians, mostly dirty and ill-clad, who smoked their large pipes placidly through the debates. Much of the discussion seemed not to interest them, and they intervened in monosyllables, save when an incursion into the *ethos* of politics let loose a flood of confused metaphysics. The Conference had the air partly of an assembly of well-mannered employers trying to deal with a specially obtuse delegation of workmen, partly of urbane hosts presiding at a village school treat.

The Russian proposals were seven in number. There was to be no forcible appropriation of territory taken in the course of the campaigns, and the occupying armies were to be at once withdrawn. Complete political independence was to be restored to all peoples who had lost it during the war. Right of self-determination



was to be granted to all nations, and in the case of territories inhabited by several nationalities special provision was to be made to safeguard the rights of minorities. No indemnities were to be paid, war requisitions were to be returned, and sufferers by the war compensated from a special fund levied on all belligerents according to their resources. Finally, colonies were to be treated on the same basis as parent countries, and any economic boycott after the war was forbidden.

Of these proposals, all except the first three were acceptable enough to the Central Powers; but no one, except the second, was acceptable to the Allies, since the terms ignore Germany's responsibility for the origin of the war and the peculiar nature of her political creed and her national ambitions. As for the first three, Germany hoped to whittle them down in actual drafting, and in the meantime to use them to make trouble with the Allies. On Christmas Day Count Czernin arose to announce the readiness of the Central Powers to assent to a peace without annexations or indemnities, provided that the Allies forthwith pledged themselves to these principles and agreed to join in the negotiations. It was accordingly decided that the Conference should rise until January 4, 1918, in order to give the Allies an opportunity of considering the proposal. On the 28th a provisional agreement was reached regarding the resumption of normal relations between Russia and Central Europe. Treaty arrangements interrupted by the war were to be resumed, and the diplomatic and consular service was to be restored. As a result Petrograd was at once flooded with German delegations. Meantime the Central Powers had prepared two articles as a draft for an eventual peace treaty. The first laid down that Russia and Germany were to declare the state of war at an end, and that as soon as peace was concluded and the Russian armies demobilized, Germany was to evacuate occupied Russian territory. But the second introduced a qualification. A special commission was to deal with the border provinces — Poland, Lithuania, Courland, and part of Esthonia and Livonia. There, said Berlin, the wish of the people had been already manifested in favour of separation from Russia and the acceptance of German protection. The Russian Government must take cognizance of such manifestations, which Germany was willing to see ratified by a plebiscite conducted without military pressure.

These proposals — which represented the views of Ludendorff as opposed to Czernin — were not satisfactory to the Bolshevik representatives, and still less to Bolshevik Headquarters. Trotski

immediately took the field. The suggestion as to the border provinces seemed to him a defiance and an impertinence; his vanity was wounded; and he had an ugly feeling that he was being played with by the adroit manipulators of Berlin and Vienna. On January 2, 1918, before the Central Committee of the Soviets, he denounced "Germany's hypocritical peace proposals," and declared that if the border nationalities were not given the right of self-determination, the militant revolution would stand forth in their defence. For the moment that centralism, which was part of the Bolshevik creed, was uppermost, and he was not minded to surrender any part of the Russian state either to Germany or to complete independence. To understand the situation, we must consider briefly the position of those parts of the old Russia other than the North and Centre at the beginning of 1918.

A revolution is always fissiparous. A strong central government may restore unity, but the first tendency is towards a break-up into provinces. This is especially true in the case of an inorganic realm, and Russia, as we have seen, had no real integration. "In March there had been one Russia from Poland to the Pacific; now, whether there were six or sixty, no man could tell. Republics sprang up in the night. Cities and districts proclaimed their independence. The realm of the Romanovs, of Catharine, of Peter the Great, was no more. Russia had reeled back into the dark ages."\*

Let us consider first the position of the Baltic states—Esthonia, Livonia, Lithuania, and Courland. In Esthonia a National Diet had been established by the Russian Provisional Government on the outbreak of the Revolution. It met at Reval in July, and formed an administration; and in November, after the Bolshevik *coup d'état*, followed the example of the Ukraine, and declared an independent republic. Thereupon the Bolsheviks intervened and dissolved the Diet; but the provisional administration continued, and in January 1918 repeated its claim to independence. The administration represented at least 65 per cent. of the people, 30 per cent. of the remainder being Bolsheviks, and 5 the pro-German aristocracy. This last section was clamouring for the occupation of Esthonia by German troops, since their great landed estates were in danger from any popular government. In Livonia, Courland, and Latvia there had long been a movement for the union of the Lettish people as an autonomous state within the Russian Empire. After the Revolution territorial councils were established

\* *The Round Table*, March 1918.

in the different districts, and a conference was held at Riga in August 1917, which demanded "a united, undivided, politically autonomous Lettland within the Russian Republic." Then came Hutier's advance, and the occupation by Germany of large portions of Lettland, and after the Revolution Bolshevism spread rapidly in the province. It was from Lettish troops that the bodyguard of the Smolny leaders was largely drawn, and the best elements in the Bolshevik army. The country as a whole was strongly anti-German, only the nobility and the great landowners turning their eyes to Berlin. In Lithuania there was the same movement towards independence. All the Baltic provinces had therefore expressed by an immense majority their views as to their future, and annexation to Germany or protection under German suzerainty was sought only by a negligible fraction of territorial magnates. There was no substance in Germany's claim that the will of these peoples was on her side. It was not these peoples that had appealed to Germany, but Germany unasked who had constituted herself their patron, as when Bethmann-Hollweg had proclaimed in the Reichstag that the states of the Baltic littoral, which had been "liberated" by German arms, would never again be enslaved by Russia. Though there were powerful Bolshevik elements among the Letts, nationalism was the dominant political creed — nationalism strongly flavoured with distrust of the new régime in Russia and fear of Teutonic encroachments.

Turn now to Poland and the Ukraine. The Regency Government of Poland, in spite of its protests, was not represented at Brest Litovsk. That unfortunate land had become a negligible quantity, and its fate was settled between Germany and Austria without its knowledge or consent. There was no unity in Polish opinion. The country was not arrayed on the side of the Russian Revolution, for the upper classes feared Bolshevism as much as they hated Prussianism. They were dependent for their existence as a class on the German sword, and it was not surprising that at the stage in which the conflict now stood Poland should be treated with scant respect. Germany was ready to use Polish territory to secure the support of any ally who was worth buying. Poland's independence had been an article of faith of the Provisional Government; her self-determination was the policy of the Bolsheviks; but her own views were variable and divided; neither Russian nor Central European; nationalist, but without any clear notion of what should constitute her nationality; opportunist, and therefore ineffectual.



It was different with the Ukraine. The people of the "Borders" (for this is the meaning of the name), the Little Russians, who numbered twenty-five millions on Russian soil and some four millions in Galicia, had, by reason of their history, their language, and their literature, acquired a distinction from their neighbours which might almost be dignified by the name of nationality. Their aspirations had been suppressed by the old régime in Russia; but during the first days of the Revolution the nationalists came into the foreground. An Ukrainian congress was opened at Kiev in April 1917, when the policy was adopted of national territorial autonomy within the future Russian Republic. The boundaries of the new state were to be the Pripet on the north, the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov on the south, the Kuban River on the east, and the provinces of Lublin and Grodno on the west. A Rada, or Central Council, was formed, and, after some bickering with the Government of Prince Lvov, it issued in June a manifesto of autonomy, and proceeded to act on it. The Ukrainians were not separatists — they claimed, indeed, to be the chief exponents of the federal idea — but they were in a hurry to get their own house in order, in view of the general confusion of the Russian Empire.

The advent of the Bolsheviks to power in November altered the position. The Ukraine was in the main an agricultural territory — the richest in Russia — with a peasant population, who, in the cases where they did not own their farms, were chiefly anxious to acquire the land from the great proprietors. Only in the towns was there much intelligent nationalism. But the Bolsheviks were opposed to both desires. As socialists they objected to the individualist peasant proprietors, and as centralists or internationalists they had little liking for provincial chauvinism. On 20th November the Rada issued a proclamation, transferring the land to communal peasant committees, establishing an eight-hours day, giving labour the control over industry, and defining the limits of the Ukraine republic. It was a bold attempt to forestall Bolshevism, and for the moment it succeeded. The new republic formed an alliance with Kaledin and the Cossacks of the Donetz basin, and with Rumania and Bessarabia. It occupied Odessa, and in the north and north-east around Kharkov and Rostov fought steadily with the Bolshevik troops. About the middle of December Trotski sent it an ultimatum, threatening war unless the Rada ceased to bar the passage of Bolshevik troops. The Rada replied that they would not tolerate the interference of Bolshevik elements in their national government. Trotski answered with the charge that



the Ukraine was supporting the *bourgeoisie*, the Cadets, and Kaledin against the sovereignty of the soviets, and that therefore she was a foe of the Republic. Such was the situation when the Brest Litovsk Conference sat. The Ukraine had virtually proclaimed her independence, and was clamouring to be represented at the Conference as a sovereign state.

The position in Finland was peculiar. She had received her autonomy from the Russian Provisional Government, but this did not satisfy her, and she made no secret that independence was her ultimate aim. Kerenski dissolved the Finnish Diet just before he fell, and that event encouraged the people to appoint an administration on their own account, which in December decreed separation from Russia. The Bolsheviks tolerated the act, and the Finnish Government thereupon instituted a tour among the courts of Europe to ask for the recognition of their independence. This was granted by Scandinavia, by France, and by Germany, but by Britain only provisionally, subject to the assent of the ultimate Peace Congress. In the meantime, however, it was clear that the Finnish constitutionalists were to suffer from the neighbourhood of Russia. *Iam proximus ardet Ucalegon*. The men responsible for Finnish independence were for the most part of the Right or Right Centre, and they were opposed by extremists who cared nothing for constitutional changes and everything for social revolution. Accordingly, the strife began of Red Guards and White Guards, and the situation in the Ukraine was repeated. It appeared, therefore, most probable that these two provinces of the old Russia would never take their orders from Smolny, and that, if they negotiated with the enemy, they would do it in their own way and for their own purpose.

Rumania, as we have seen, was in desperate straits. Cut off from her Western Allies, with an implacable foe in front of her, and chaos and famine at her back, it was becoming clear that her heroic stand could be no longer maintained. She was regarded with hatred by the Bolsheviks, partly because of her steady resolution to fight, partly because of her firm handling of the revolutionary element in Tcherbachev's troops, and partly because of her alliance with Bessarabia. This latter province, for the most part inhabited by men of Rumanian blood, lay between the Dniester and the Black Sea, the Pruth and the Danube. It was Rumania's only possible support, and in December the proclamation of an independent republic enabled Bessarabia to open up friendly relations with her blood brothers. The Bolsheviks, after their fashion,

denounced the new state as a bourgeois government of reactionary landlords, and made it clear that at the first opportunity they would take order with both Rumania and her ally.

The rest of Russia did not for the moment come into the questions debated at Brest Litovsk. In the Caucasus there was wild confusion — Armenians, Georgians, and Tartars now moving towards union under pressure from the Turks, now concentrating on their national differences and forming embryo states. In Central Asia Moslems, Bolsheviks, and Moderates, under different names, were at variance in Siberia, in Russian Turkestan, and in the khanates of Bokhara and Khiva. In those parts Pan-Turanianism and Pan-Islamism added to the ferment, and at the beginning of 1918 he would have been a bold man who dared to forecast the future of any area between the Black Sea and the Pacific. The one certain fact was that ancient unrests had come to life again, that old political barriers had broken down, and that the poison of Europe was being blown with every wind across the Steppes. The breakdown of Russia had done for the Central Powers what they had failed to do for themselves; it had prepared for Turkey and for Germany an avenue into the forbidden land. To widen that avenue and to make sure of it for ever was, perhaps, more in the mind of Kuhlmann at Brest Litovsk than any tinkering with the border states. For with good luck the madness of Bolshevism might give Germany not the modest outlet on the Persian Gulf which she had long desired, but an imperial highway to the Pacific.

The position was, therefore, that in the Baltic provinces, in Finland, in the Ukraine, and, to a large extent, in the Caucasus, Siberia, and Central Asia, the most powerful impulse was towards nationalism and independence, not towards Bolshevik internationalism. Why, then, did Trotski make ready to dispute with Germany on this point above all others? The inconsistency of his attitude with the general creed of his party led many at the time to assume that the whole opposition was fictitious, and that the Bolsheviks, seeking peace at any price, and conscious of their weakness, desired only to save their credit by a show of independence. It is more likely that the opposition was genuine. For one thing, the Smolny leaders did not wish to estrange their Lettish troops, who, Bolshevik or no, were strongly nationalist. For another, the Bolsheviks were centralists, and, while they had little love for provincial nationalism, they had less for brazen annexations by a foreign Power. Again, Trotski had always one eye fixed

upon the German masses, whom he hoped to attract to his standard by revealing the gross imperialism of their masters. Last, and most important, the brittle vanity of Smolny had been offended. Only Lenin among the Bolsheviks was wholly logical. To Trotsky and his like it was a bitter thing to acknowledge impotence, and they hoped by a stubborn bluff to get a better bargain.

On January 4, 1918, the period of ten days' grace expired during which the Allies were to accept or reject the offer to open peace negotiations. The Allies had treated the proposal with disdainful silence. On the 6th Trotsky himself journeyed to Brest Litovsk, for the situation had become delicate. His truculence in Petrograd had impaired the good temper of his Teutonic colleagues, and his assiduous propaganda was disquieting their mind. It was necessary to temporize, especially as Kuhlmann announced with some asperity on the 9th that, since Russia's Allies had made no response, the offer to negotiate had lapsed, and implied that the universal appeal of Bolshevism was less potent than its devotees imagined. Hitherto the Bolsheviks had not talked of a separate peace; now they were compelled to disregard Russia's former Allies, and to consider a peace for Russia alone. On the 10th Trotsky announced his readiness to continue negotiations on this basis, though he tried to salve his dignity by declaring that, while peace was in the forefront of his programme, he would sign only a "democratic and just" peace. He was in a chastened mood, for on the 11th he submitted to the presence at the Conference of an independent delegation from the Ukraine.

On the 12th he laid on the table the Bolshevik proposals for the evacuation and reconstruction of the Russian territory now held by Germany. Two days later Germany categorically refused them. Kuhlmann declared that there could be no relinquishment of an acre of Russian soil till a general peace had been concluded. Germany's terms were stiffening as she felt surer of her ground. She already saw a certainty of peace with the Ukraine and with Rumania, which would give her a road to the Black Sea and the East. Let that be gained, and she could deal with the Bolsheviks at her leisure. On the 16th separate negotiations were begun between the Austro-German delegates and the Ukraine, in spite of Trotsky's vehement protests. The Rada was in a cleft stick, with the Red Guards beginning to press in from the east towards Poltava and Kiev. The peasant individualism and nationalism for which it stood were apparently in greater danger from Lenin



and Trotski than from the Germans, so it made haste to seek support in the only quarter where help could be found. On the 18th the Conference was adjourned, and Trotski returned to Petrograd. He had stuck firmly to his demands in the case of the border provinces, and matters had reached an *impasse*.

On the 18th the long-awaited Constituent Assembly was opened in Petrograd. It had but a brief sitting. At four o'clock on the morning of the 19th a body of Bolshevik sailors dissolved it, as Cromwell had dissolved the Long Parliament. The event shocked the Western world, which had not yet discovered the true nature of Bolshevism; but on its declared principles the action was reasonable. Lenin and his colleagues stood for a class oligarchy, and to submit to the rulings of a constituent assembly was as foreign to their ideas as for a pirate to be guided by the resolutions of the travellers whom he is plundering. From this date the odd sentimentalism about the Bolsheviks among intellectuals in Britain and America — it never existed in France or Italy — began to give place to a truer perception of the facts. So unsentimental a creed deserved a better fate than to be crooned over by the pacifists and humanitarians of the West. Another event helped the illumination. Two well-known moderate statesmen, Shingarev and Kokoshin, were dragged from their sick-beds by miscreants of the Red Guard and most brutally murdered. To those who were honoured by Shingarev's friendship, the death of that wise, charitable, and far-sighted patriot was the final condemnation of the Bolshevik usurpation. Madmen, drunk with blood and dogma, sat in the seat of power, and their vanity unleashed the furies of hell.

Trotski, who had for the moment the lead among his colleagues, now struck wildly. He had presented an ultimatum to Rumania on 15th January, and by the 20th he heard of the coming agreement between the Central Powers and the Ukraine, news confirmed by Kuhlmann's declaration in the Reichstag on the 25th. On the 26th he definitely broke with the Rada, and the following day he prepared his followers for disaster by warning them that he could hold out no hope of victory nor guarantee a "democratic" peace. On 30th January the Brest Litovsk Conference was resumed, and he delivered one more impassioned appeal against both the separation of the Ukraine and the German policy towards the Baltic provinces. Meanwhile the Bolshevik troops under Muraviev were winning easy victories over the scanty levies of the Rada. On the 3rd of February they took Kiev, and put the



government of the new republic to flight. The Ukraine turned in despair to the Central Powers, and on 9th February, at Brest Litovsk, peace was signed between the two parties.\* The defence of the little republic was now in stronger hands than its own, and the army group of Linsingen moved eastward along the Pripet. On the 10th Trotski flung up his hands. He refused to sign a formal treaty, but announced that the state of war with Germany and Austria was over, and that the Russian forces on all fronts would be demobilized.

Kuhlmann was not unprepared for the situation. The Bolsheviks had declined to negotiate further, and had fled to their tents; they must be driven out of them, and forced to make a clean-cut agreement. The civilians retired, and the soldiers took command. On the plea that the Bolsheviks were using it to spread their propaganda, the armistice was suspended, and the army of Eichhorn was ordered to advance. A few divisions were all that was needed to secure an almost bloodless victory. The Russian front on the west, supposed to be held by Red Guards, had long been no more than "a string of booths at which Krilenko's garrulous warriors exchanged the foodstuffs and loot plundered from Russian and Polish estates and farms for the manufactured products of Germany." Eichhorn took Reval, Dvinsk, and Pskov, and came within 150 miles of Petrograd; while Linsingen marched to the relief of Kiev. An ultimatum was presented to Smolny, demanding the acceptance of the German peace terms within forty-eight hours. There was no longer any talk of negotiations; the terms, far harder than those put forward at Brest Litovsk, were now dictated by the conqueror to the conquered. Trotski and Radek might have resisted, but Lenin declared for surrender, and his influence prevailed. On 24th February the Bolsheviks capitulated, and on 3rd March was signed the Peace of Brest Litovsk. Kuhlmann advanced from success to success. On 5th March a preliminary treaty of peace was wrung from Rumania, and two days later a treaty with Finland was added to the trophies of his diplomacy.

It remains to consider what these treaties gave to the Central Powers. In the Ukraine — the old weapon against Russia which had been used in the past by Lithuanians, Poles, and Swedes — by the erection of an independent state Germany split the Russian nation, and won a gateway to the Steppes. Her immediate interest

\* This was largely the doing of Ludendorff, who, on the 7th, brusquely informed Kuhlmann that the thing must be settled within three days.

there was economic — to find a new reservoir of supplies — and by one article of the Treaty provision was made for “a reciprocal exchange of the most important agricultural and industrial products.” She obtained access to the Black Sea, which was now wholly dominated by her, and this gave her the chance of guiding the tangled affairs of the Caucasus according to her will. Russia was stripped of all her acquisitions since 1667. The Bolsheviks undertook to evacuate Esthonia and Livonia, the Ukraine and Finland. The districts of Ardahan, Kars, and Batum were to be handed over to the Turks. All Bolshevik propaganda was to be discontinued both in Central Europe and in the new occupied territory, and the unfavourable commercial treaty of 1904 was revived. Rumania had to give up the whole of the Dobrudja, the Petroseny coal basin, and the Carpathian passes; to demobilize her army, to promote Austro-German traffic through Moldavia and Bessarabia to Odessa, and to bind herself to certain economic concessions which were left to be settled later. Presently it appeared that these meant the complete subjection of Rumania’s commerce and industry, including her oil fields, to the control of Austro-German financial groups. Finland escaped lightly, it being Germany’s aim to establish there an anti-revolutionary government under her ægis. Finnish independence was recognized, and provision was made for settling the question of the Aaland islands, the strategical point of the eastern Baltic. As for Poland, so little did national claims matter in German eyes, that the district of Cholm was lopped from her territory and transferred to the Ukraine.

And these were not mere paper concessions. There were armies waiting to exploit them to the uttermost. Linsingen and Eichhorn were pressing eastward and towards the Black Sea littoral. German troops were landing in Finland and on the Aaland isles; and in the Caucasus Trebizond had been occupied by the Turks, Erzerum was about to be retaken, and the whole Persian frontier was ablaze. Kuhlmann had played high, and had won greatly. He had established the nucleus of a group of weak statelets on the Eastern marches under German suzerainty; he had routes on both sides of the Black Sea to the oil wells of Baku, the cotton lands of Ferghana, and the old danger zone of the Indian border. He had scattered the Russian army to the winds. Alexeiev and Kaledin were at variance, and both were soon to die; the Cossacks were at the most prepared to defend their own lands, and had lost both their discipline and their spirit. He had left a fair field for the

hundreds of thousands of German, Austrian, and Magyar prisoners in Siberia to organize and push Germany's interests between the Urals and the Pacific. Even now his agents were at work on this vital task. And in north and central Russia there was only the foolish anarchism of Smolny, beggared of all repute, and viewed, as he believed, with increasing detestation by a starving people. Presently the pear would ripen and fall into his hand. There seemed no chance of a revival of Russia, for she had no leaders and no soldiers to follow them. In a little Germany would intervene by request to restore order, and with it a permanent Teutonic control. His countrymen, exulting in their bloodless victories, saw the Russian menace gone for ever, and a zone of exploitation, wider than they had ever dreamed, waiting for their use. The Emperor chose to attribute the result to the valor of his troops; Kuhlmann, with greater justice, might have claimed it as the triumph of his patient skill.

But in truth he had had an easy task, for he had been opposed by babes. During the Brest Litovsk sittings enthusiasts in the West had hailed Trotski's performance as the new "people's" diplomacy. But the new diplomacy was only the old bluff. Ignorant alike of human nature and practical affairs, he was a plaything in the hands of his opponents. The Bolsheviks could only have succeeded had they possessed a doctrine of such compelling power that it commanded forthwith a magical assent from the whole earth. But it missed fire everywhere, except among their own broken and confused people. Having failed on that score, they had no other card. They could offer nothing which Germany could not take. They could threaten; but they had no power to enforce their threats, for they had begun their career by destroying their army. Lenin talked of the Peace of Brest Litovsk as like the Peace of Tilsit, under which Russia had suffered indignities that she had speedily avenged; and Trotski vapoured about raising a new army to throw off the German yoke. But a leader cannot preach with acceptance the folly of war and the crime of nationalism, and then extemporize in a week armies to defend an independence he has scoffed at.

Such was one side of the Bolsheviks' record. They had lost for Russia 26 per cent. of her total population, 27 per cent. of her arable land, 37 per cent. of her average crops, 26 per cent. of her railway system, 33 per cent. of her manufacturing industries, 73 per cent. of her total iron production, and 75 per cent. of her coal-fields. So much for the policy of "no annexation." They had



saddled themselves with a gigantic but as yet unassessed payment by way of war tribute, and had been compelled to grant free export of oils and a preferential commercial treaty. So much for "no indemnities." They had placed under German rule fifty-five millions of unwilling Slavs. So much for "self-determination." Their achievement in internal government was the same. Being boycotted by the educated classes, it was small wonder that they showed an unvarying record of administrative failure. Much of their policy was naked brigandage. Liberty of discussion, both in the press and in public assemblies, disappeared. Atrocities happened daily; but, though these were officially deplored, no attempt was made to bring the criminals to trial. The houses of the well-to-do were looted with impunity; street robberies were hourly incidents; and, since law courts were abolished, the only check was the occasional lynching of a detected thief. State loans were repudiated, and thousands of innocent people reduced to beggary. Banks and factories were confiscated, and left to the will of ignorant workmen or the fraudulent satellites of Smolny. Taxation became a system of plunder, and immense sums were raised and squandered among Red Guards and Bolshevik officials. Churches were desecrated; religion was officially banished from marriages and funerals; divorce was made so easy that it became a national pastime. Alcohol, forbidden in Russia since 1914, played its part in the chaos; for the right of distilling spirits became a Bolshevik perquisite, and vodka was a favoured form of Bolshevik propaganda.

History will make large allowances for the Russian people in their hour of tragedy; but on Bolshevism history has centuries ago pronounced its verdict. It was the eternal slave insurrection, the revolt of those intolerant or incapable of freedom, whose natural aim is the servile state. Its votaries had courage and single-mindedness in their sinister purpose; but beyond that the most liberal apologist dare not go. It outfaced Germany, it is true, and for a little of it was anti-German; but its creed was in essence the same as hers, and, as will later appear, the two were soon to drift into a natural alliance. Both were tyrannies; both denied the first principles of democracy, and appealed to the single arbitrament of force. They were rival Prussianisms, and between the two it is likely that the world will prefer the Teutonic brand. There is a tale in Malory that Sir Percival, riding through a forest, came upon a lion engaged with a serpent, and drew his sword to help the former as the "more natural beast of the twain." Of the



two beasts that fought over the body of Russia the Prussian was the less unnatural.

The results were grave indeed for the Allies. At a moment when Germany had limited the active war to one single front in the West she had also won possession of supply grounds in the East, of which the potentialities were unknown. Oil, foodstuffs, and cotton would now escape the mesh of the blockade. Moreover, by her access to Central Asia, she was in a position to kindle new fires from Persia to China which the Allies would have neither the men nor the leisure to extinguish. She had made conquests which, even conceding a stalemate in the West, would leave her with the most solid and tangible profits from the war. On the other hand, the downfall of Russia had taught the world two facts which might yet be worth all the immediate disasters. It had done much among thinking men to discredit crude and facile schemes of social revolution. And it had cast a high light upon the policy of Germany, and revealed her as unchanged from the war mood of August 1914. The world observed that the spurious democracy of the summer of 1917 had been sloughed so soon as her prospects brightened. She had annexed shamelessly, and had imposed terms of bitter humiliation and loss upon the unfortunate peoples that had fallen into her hand. Her mind was plain, her purpose writ so large that the most stubborn German apologist among the Allies could not but read it. More than ever did the war appear as a struggle to the death between a free civilization and that which must crush it or be crushed by it, but could not be parleyed with.

The repute of the Slav both in the council and in the field had sunk thus low, when there came a revival from an unexpected quarter. The Czechs of Bohemia, and their kinsmen the Slovaks of Northern Hungary, had clung for four centuries to their national culture. They were conscripted by the Dual Monarchy; but their hearts were with the cause of the Slav, and whole regiments, like the 28th of Prague, had deserted to the Russian side. After the Revolution a Czecho-Slovak brigade was formed, which soon became a division, and formed the spear-point of Brussilov's last offensive. If Russia declined to fight, so would not they, and they demanded to be sent to France to continue the war. The Bolsheviks were willing that they should leave Russia, and in February two divisions were granted a passage to Vladivostok. But when peace was signed at Brest Litovsk the bulk of the Czecho-Slovak forces were in the Ukraine, and their position became desperate

in view of Linsingen's advance. Their flanks were turned, and the Germans held the railroad one hundred miles in their rear. Nevertheless they cut their way through, and, to prove their loyalty to the Government then in being, surrendered most of their equipment to the Bolsheviks, though a single regiment of them could have taken Moscow. Then began their amazing journey eastward, betrayed time and again by Bolshevik treachery, their wounded murdered, attacked daily by Red Guards and Austro-German prisoners led by German agents. Yet they most honourably refused to fight with Russians or to meddle with Russian politics, and neither threats nor cajolery could turn them from their purpose. After fifty-six days the vanguard of this new Ten Thousand reached the sea — surely one of the miracles of history — while other detachments remained in western Siberia and on the road to Archangel. In the self-restraint, single-heartedness, and courage of the Czecho-Slovaks lay the promise of the future resurgence of their race.

## CHAPTER XCI

### POLITICAL REACTIONS

*October 1917-April 18, 1918*

Lord Lansdowne's Letter—Discussion of War Aims—A "League of Nations"—President Wilson's Fourteen Points—M. Clemenceau becomes Premier of France—Mr. Lloyd George's Position—The War Cabinet—The "Business Man"—The Surveyor-General of Supply—Retirement of Lord Jellicoe—Criticism of Army Management—Unity of Command—The Versailles Council—The Executive Committee—Resignation of Sir William Robertson—Weakness of the Versailles Arrangement—Lord Milner becomes Secretary of War.

#### I

THE dramatic changes of fortune in the autumn and winter of 1917 could not but affect the course of politics in all the belligerent countries. We have seen the reactions due to the Russian Revolution, and these were continued and intensified by Caporetto and Cambrai and the Bolshevik adventure. Two subjects above others dominated the political thought of Europe and America at the moment, and both derived their origin from the puzzlement of the world, the reversal of hopes and calculations, and the sense that the contest had entered upon a new and more desperate phase. One was the exact war aims of the combatants; the other the need for a drastic revision of war methods. Both inquiries had the same general purpose—a closer unity in thought and action. The struggle was now in its fourth year, and the human mind was driven to explore its purpose, with a view not only to a still far-off peace, but to the unanimity of spirit needful in alliances about to undergo a fierier trial. So also failure and hope deferred compelled an inspection of every weapon to decide if it were bright and keen enough for its task. This process of self-examination was most marked among the Allies, who for the moment were the butt of fortune; the Central Powers had, after the spasm of unrest in July, won such confidence in the proven value of their methods

that they were concerned only to use the new mood of their enemies as a means of sowing distrust among them and inspiring disunion.

But even among the Central Powers there were doubters in the general jubilation. They were chiefly found in Austria, which had long ago lost heart in the war, and was faced with the unpleasant alternatives of defeat — which meant disruption — and victory, which involved a phantom existence under German tutelage. In either case her bankruptcy was assured. Count Czernin, her Foreign Minister, had a hankering after emotional liberalism; he courted popularity, and showed an amiable weakness for the rhetoric as opposed to the substance of democracy. At a public dinner at Budapest early in October he gave his own views of peace, forecasting a general disarmament and a League of Nations, now that Central Europe had shown that it could not be subdued by force of arms. His main argument was financial — that continued expenditure on armaments on the scale which modern war demanded would mean the ruin of every state. He added that, as a pre-condition of the golden age he hoped for, the “freedom of the high seas” must be established, and the idea of economic war banished from the world. To the Austrian Minister belonged, at any rate, the credit of divining the greatest peril which lay in front of the conquering Teutonic League. This was before Caporetto; after it, on the 28th of November, the new German Imperial Chancellor in the Reichstag spoke in a different tone. Count Hertling recapitulated with serious joy the achievements of his country, and congratulated his hearers on the unanimity of all German hearts. “Nothing can, nothing shall, be changed in the foundations of our imperial constitution.” The war, he said, was a war on Germany’s part not of aggression but of sober and honourable defence. Brest Litovsk was soon to prove that this defence was the defence not of her frontiers but of her conquests.

On the following day a British newspaper published a letter from Lord Lansdowne, a former British Foreign Secretary, which gave a notable stimulus to peace discussions throughout Europe. Much of it was in matter sound and indisputable; all of it was guarded and temperate in tone. The gist of his argument was that he detected signs of a possibility of satisfactory negotiations with the enemy, provided Germany were given guarantees on five points; for if her peace party had such assurances they could bear down the opposition of the fanatics. The points were: that the Allies did not seek the annihilation of Germany as a Great Power; that they did not seek to impose on her a government



other than that of her own choice; that, "except as a legitimate war measure," they did not wish to destroy Germany's commercial future; that after the war they were willing to examine in conference the international questions concerned with the "freedom of the seas"; that they were prepared to enter into an international pact for the settlement of international disputes by peaceful means. No single one of Lord Lansdowne's propositions need have aroused violent disagreement in any section of the Allies, and most were fair statements of Allied policy. But the orientation of the letter was false, though it did not merit the abuse which a section of the British press poured upon the writer, heedless of his years and his long record of public service. It was an echo from a past age, a vanished age of sedate diplomatic bargaining, when peace was made between combatants by a little give and take of territory and a few concessions to national pride. His appeal was based on two assumptions, one of them false, the other indisputably true: that a complete Allied victory in the field was impossible (an opinion at this time held by many soldiers and civilians among the Allies); and that in any case a war to a finish would destroy or radically alter those social and political institutions in Europe which he held dear. But the mischief lay less in what he said than in what he left unsaid. His tepid statement of the Allied purpose was so inadequate that it sounded to the enemy like a confession of defeat. And the mischief was increased by the use made of the aged statesman by the small and extreme pacifist section who were willing for their own ends to exploit this voice from a dying world which for all other purposes they rejected with scorn.

By December the public discussion of war aims was fairly launched among the Allies. Mr. Wilson's address to Congress on 4th December, besides announcing a declaration of war on Austria-Hungary, repeated in unmistakable terms what had always been the central point of American policy, that peace could not be discussed, much less made, with the present rulers of Germany. The time for negotiations would come "when the German people have spokesmen whose word we can believe." On 11th December Mr. Asquith at Birmingham repeated this declaration with his own felicity of phrase, and three days later Mr. Lloyd George dealt trenchantly with the attitude revealed in the Lansdowne letter. A peace of victory, he said, was essential for the Allies, since a true peace involved reparation by and punishment of the wrongdoers, and it was idle to expect the wrongdoer to negotiate honestly on such matters. He warned his hearers that there was no half-

way house between defeat and victory, and that the danger to the State lay not in the extreme pacifists, but in the upholders of war who had grown weary by the way. But the most significant event of the month was the approval by a special Labour Conference of a memorandum on war aims drafted by representatives of British Labour—a memorandum subsequently accepted by an Inter-Allied Labour and Socialist Conference held in London in the following February. The Labour Party was in a favourable position to perform such a task. Unlike the other parties, it had not been drawn wholesale into the administrative machine, and it possessed members, men of great ability and knowledge, who had the leisure and the aloofness to meditate upon the future. The document had some of the faults of its class. It was inclined to vagueness and wordiness, and its proposals as to the destiny of tropical Africa were scarcely within the limits of practical politics. But on the main matters it adequately expressed the sense of the Allied peoples, and it had the special merit that in the multitude of lesser aims it never lost sight of the essential purpose of the war. The performance did credit to the insight and the judgment of British Labour.

The issue of this memorandum made it desirable that the British Government should follow suit with an official pronouncement. Hitherto they had not condescended to details, contenting themselves with approving the numerous manifestoes of the American President. There were some who were averse to any specification of terms, save the widest generalities, showing the traditional British distrust of definitions. For our nation has ever been strangely disinclined to envisage the future, being, in Milton's words, "valiant, indeed, and prosperous to win a field, but to know the end and reason of winning, unjudicious and unwise." But such critics failed to distinguish between a statement of purpose in order to make the prosecution of the war more effective and a premature offer of terms to the enemy in order to bring the war to an end. They failed, also, to realize the new phase on which the whole question had entered.

The overtures from the enemy—not only his official statements, but the subtler working of Kuhlmann's emissaries—had engendered a mood which demanded a clear and definite restatement of purpose. Circumstances had issued, in Necker's phrase, an "invitation to thinkers." The Allies must be united in their declared war objects as well as in their war mechanism. Again, the publication by the Bolsheviks of various secret treaties from the archives of Petrograd had proved that the temper of 1915

clashed a little with that of 1917. Those treaties provided for annexations by Italy in Dalmatia, Anatolia, and the Ægean, and by Rumania in districts scarcely Rumanian; Russia was to have Constantinople, and a free hand to annex not only German Poland but East Prussia; and there was evidence that responsible statesmen in France had considered at one time not only the return of Alsace-Lorraine, but the acquiring of German territory on the west bank of the Rhine. In 1915 such provisions had seemed justifiable to the governments concerned in order to provide for the Allies that national security which was threatened by the Central Powers. The war had been entered upon by them for the cause of nationalism, and nationalism in the narrow sense is apt to think mainly of frontiers and territorial adjustments.

But by 1917 the Allies had come to conceive the problem otherwise. The future security of the world depended less upon juggling with boundaries than upon the destruction of Germany's power of offence. If the evil thing in Germany remained, no adjustment of territory would safeguard civilization; if it disappeared, such adjustment fell into its proper place as a means towards the greater end, to be applied with the concurrence and goodwill of the whole world. National security was not to be won by increasing national strength for armed defence, but by decreasing the danger of attack and the power of the attacker. The change was due largely to the clear vision of America, but also in a great degree to a new phenomenon. The war had begun by strengthening nationalism, the patriotism of the homogeneous unit; but as it continued, a certain internationalism had grown up, not as a substitute for the other, but as a creed which embraced and enriched it. Just as during the nineteenth century dynastic loyalties had given place to national loyalties, so the latter were being translated into wider aims, which to a large extent cut across existing political divisions. This movement was not hostile to patriotism, but it regarded the national ideal as not in itself adequate to meet the demands of society. Nationalism did not promise final relief from those ills of which the war was the climax; it could not by itself remove the "covering cast over all peoples, and the veil that is brought over all nations."

Thoughtful minds throughout the Alliance were therefore inclined to put the war purpose somewhat as follows: The anti-social, anti-national spirit of Prussianism must be broken in the field, and thus degraded and banished from the world; but security for free development cannot be found merely in the destruc-



tion of the enemy, nor can it be won by annexations and adjustments, which involve a perpetual armed wardenship of the marches; it can be found only in the provision of a new international sanction to guarantee by the combined forces of civilization the rights of each unit. It will be seen that the centre of gravity had moved a long way from the secret treaties of 1915.

Hence a League of Nations was the fundamental war aim; the rest were only machinery to provide a clean foundation for it. Unfortunately this was not fully recognized at the time by any Allied Government save America, and M. Clemenceau went out of his way to declare the conception unbalanced and unpractical. Yet it was the only practical ideal before the world, in the sense that it was the only one which met the whole needs of the case. If a statement of war aims was meant to solidify the Alliance and drive a wedge between Prussianism and the German people, then a sound internationalism must be the first item in the programme. It offered the Allies an enduring union, based on co-operation instead of rivalry; it offered the German people security for their rights of possession and development so soon as they discarded their false gods; it offered a world weary of strife some hope of a lasting peace. In the words of the Labour Party's statement: "Whoever triumphs, the people will have lost unless an international system is established which will prevent war. It would mean nothing to declare the right of peoples to self-determination if this right were left at the mercy of new violations."

On January 5, 1918, the Prime Minister issued to the Trade Union delegates met in conference a statement, framed after consultation with Mr. Asquith, Lord Grey of Fallodon, and the representatives of the Overseas Dominions. He began by declaring what Britain was not fighting for — the destruction of Germany or Austria-Hungary, or that part of Turkey which was truly Turkish. Her aims in Europe were: the complete restoration of Belgium, Serbia, and Montenegro, and the occupied parts of France, Italy, and Rumania, with indemnification for losses; the restoration to France of Alsace-Lorraine; an independent Poland, comprising all the genuine Polish elements which desired to be included in a national state; true self-government for the Austro-Hungarian nationalities that desired it; and the satisfaction of the legitimate irredentist claims of Italy and Rumania. Outside Europe, she was prepared to allow Constantinople to remain the Turkish capital, provided the sea passage between the Black Sea and the Mediterranean were internationalized; Arabia, Armenia,



Mesopotamia, Syria, and Palestine were to be entitled to the recognition of their separate national characters; the German colonies in Africa were to be held at the disposal of a Conference which would have primary regard to the interests of the native inhabitants. There must be reparation for injuries done by the enemy in defiance of international law, especially as regards the submarine outrages. Finally, an international organization must be created to limit armaments and diminish the possibilities of war.

In substance the declaration was sound so far as it went, but it was not skilful in its phrasing or in the arrangement of its parts. The League of Nations was brought in as a tailpiece, when it should have been the preface, since on it depended the justice of all the territorial provisions. As a means of formally codifying the Allied war aims the statement was valuable; but obviously it could have little persuasive effect on the German people, inasmuch as the various Allied demands were not organically related to a principle which would provide also for Germany's security. On 8th January President Wilson issued a similar document, embodying America's views in fourteen points, which were destined to hold the ground for the next year as the Allied charter.\* These points were virtually the same as Mr. Lloyd George's, save that they included a reference to "freedom of navigation in peace and war," and dealt more fully with the League of Nations.

\* The points were:—

- (1.) Open covenants of peace and no secret diplomacy in the future.
- (2.) Absolute freedom of navigation in peace and war outside territorial waters, except when seas may be closed by international action.
- (3.) Removal as far as possible of all economic barriers.
- (4.) Adequate guarantees for the reduction of national armaments.
- (5.) An absolutely impartial adjustment of colonial claims, the interests of the peoples concerned having equal weight with the claims of the Government whose title is to be determined.
- (6.) All Russian territory to be evacuated, and Russia given full opportunity for self-development, the Powers aiding.
- (7.) Complete restoration of Belgium in full and free sovereignty.
- (8.) All French territory freed, and the wrong done by Prussia in 1871 in the matter of Alsace-Lorraine righted.
- (9.) Readjustment of Italian frontiers on lines of nationality.
- (10.) Peoples of Austria-Hungary accorded an opportunity of autonomous development.
- (11.) Rumania, Serbia, and Montenegro evacuated, Serbia given access to the sea, and relations of Balkan States settled on lines of allegiance and nationality.
- (12.) Non-Turkish nationalities in the Ottoman Empire assured of autonomous development, and the Dardanelles to be permanently free to all ships.
- (13.) An independent Polish State.
- (14.) A general association of nations must be formed under specific covenants for the purpose of affording mutual guarantees of political independence and territorial integrity to great and small States alike.

To the American manifesto Germany and Austria hastened to make answer, and during January both Count Hertling and Count Czernin discussed it in detail in public speeches. That month and the first week of February saw serious Labour unrest in both countries. There was something not unlike a general stoppage of work in Austria, and dangerous strikes at Berlin, Kiel, Hamburg, and Munich. In every case they were sternly quelled with the aid of the soldiers, and in Germany the Scheidemann party took the side of the Government. But these proofs of discontent compelled the statesmen of Central Europe to walk warily, and the German and Austrian replies to President Wilson were diplomatic documents, directed as much to their own peoples as to America. Both Hertling and Czernin welcomed the President's more general provisions — such as the League of Nations, free navigation, and no economic war or secret diplomacy — declaring that in these clauses he had expressed the deepest aspirations of their hearts. To the detailed proposals they demurred. Hertling declined to talk about Russia, declaring that the arrangements made at Brest Litovsk were wholly a matter between Russia and the Central Powers, though Czernin suggested a compromise. As for Belgium, its forcible annexation was no part of German policy; but its evacuation and restoration could not be undertaken till the Allies accepted the principle of the territorial integrity of the Central Powers and their allies. Hertling refused the demand for Alsace-Lorraine; Czernin repudiated the demands as to Italy, Rumania, Serbia, and Montenegro; both declined to entertain the Turkish proposals, and both declared that Poland was a question for the Central Powers alone to consider.

On 11th February Mr. Wilson in his address to Congress laid down four fundamental principles as the pre-conditions of peace. These were: that each part of the final settlement must be based upon the essential justice of that particular case, and must likewise contribute towards a permanent peace; that peoples must not be bartered from sovereignty to sovereignty as if they were chattels; that all territorial settlements must be made in the interest of the populations concerned; and that all well-defined national aspirations must be given the fullest satisfaction, provided that in so doing no new elements of discord were introduced or old antagonisms perpetuated. On 25th February Count Hertling, in the Reichstag, accepted the four principles, fortifying himself by quotations from St. Augustine. As it happened, he had just approved the treaties with Bolshevik Russia, Rumania,

and the Ukraine, and had the boldness to claim these masterpieces of spoliation as consistent with American ideals. The thing was so out of tune with his speeches of January that shrewd observers suspected a new policy. They were right, for by this time the Army chiefs had appeared before the secret session of the Reichstag and promised Germany complete victory in the field. The Imperial Chancellor might well amuse himself at America's expense by lip service to dogmas which his actions defied; before the autumn came Germany hoped to be beyond the need of quibbling over pedantries, and to be dictating her terms to a submissive world.

## II

We have already seen the political events of the autumn and winter in Russia and Italy. In France it had been long apparent that M. Ribot's Ministry was losing power. It was unpopular with the Socialists; it was not greatly trusted by the Army; and on 7th September it placed its resignation in the President's hands. On 12th September M. Painlevé, the former Minister of War, became Premier, with a Cabinet largely formed out of the old; the Socialists stood outside, but announced that they would support the Ministry if it merited their support. For two uneasy months M. Painlevé remained in office. He was a man of great ability and most honest purpose; but he failed to appeal to the interest and imagination of his countrymen, and, being an indifferent speaker, he had little weight in the Chamber. Early in November the situation became impossible: the Ministry fell, and the President took the bold step of entrusting M. Clemenceau with the formation of a government. On 16th November M. Clemenceau took office, and defied the malcontent Socialists by going on his way without them. The military situation since Caporetto had become grave, and he called upon the good sense of republican France to show a steady front to the enemy. His countrymen responded with a support which no French Ministry since the outbreak of war had enjoyed, and the world was presented with the exhilarating spectacle of a man who despised party intrigue, rejected all counsels of worldly prudence, appealed, like Chatham, to the nation behind the placemen — and won.

Georges Clemenceau was at this time seventy-six years of age, and since his early youth had played a notable part in public affairs. He was the French spirit incarnate — a master of the *beau geste*, a maker and destroyer of governments, a man with an inexhaustible



zest for life, brilliant, warm-hearted, catholic in his interests, and endowed with unhesitating courage. He was such a figure as at the back of his heart every Frenchman loves, and he could count upon this national inclination, as he could count upon the confidence of the men in the trenches. The peculiar strength of his position was that he was utterly single-hearted, suffering from no doubts as to the perfect justice of his cause and the complete villainy of his adversaries. His creed was nineteenth-century radicalism—nationalist, anti-clerical, rational—with no mysticism or loose fringes. Hence every hesitation, moral or intellectual, every subtlety that might distract the national mind or weaken the national front, he met with relentless and contemptuous opposition. In a world of wavering counsels his courage, his ardour, even his narrowness were the qualities most needed—especially in France, whose heart was being made sick by hope deferred. His business was to guide and encourage his country in the fiery trials he saw approaching, and not less to cleanse public life from the foul stuff which clogged the nation's effort. Ever since the spring France had been gravely perturbed by treacherous elements in her midst—German agents who seduced her baser press and venal politicians, sinister figures that strove to bring the pacificism of the extreme socialists into line with *défaitisme* in other lands, and so play the game of Berlin. Against such treason M. Clemenceau declared truceless war. The small fry of intrigue were arrested, tried, and punished. M. Malvy, a former Minister of the Interior, under whose régime of complaisance the mischief had grown, was not spared, and in time found his reward in exile. But the new Premier did not strike only at underlings. M. Caillaux, the great master of the backstairs, had since 1914 been leading a strange, peripatetic life, and wherever he went mischief seemed to seed and flourish. No French Government had hitherto dared to attack this formidable personage, who held more than one political group in the hollow of his hand. But M. Clemenceau dared. In December he decided to bring M. Caillaux before a court-martial on the charge of having endangered the security of the State, and on January 14, 1918, M. Caillaux, to his immense surprise, was arrested.

### III

In Britain the position of Mr. Lloyd George was not seriously attacked. His energy, his emotional vitality, even the speed with which he made decisions only to rescind them, while perturbing to



sober, old-fashioned people, were not unacceptable to a nation which had an acute sense of urgent problems and but little leisure to reflect upon the best solution. He had been a year in office, and his peculiar qualities and defects were now revealed to his colleagues, and — more dimly — to the nation at large. There were those who saw in him the greatest war Minister since Chat-ham; there was no lack of critics who denied to him any gift except a low cunning; the truth, as he himself was accustomed to declare, lay in neither extreme. His defects were obvious for all to see. Lacking the normal education of those engaged in British public life, he had amazing gaps in his mental furniture, and consequently was without that traditional sense of proportion which often gives an air of wisdom to mediocrities. He had a unique power of assimilating knowledge, but not an equal power of retaining it. He could master a complex subject at lightning speed, but next morning the whole affair would be wiped from his memory. Hence his mental processes were somewhat lacking in continuity, for he had to be informed so frequently on a subject *de novo*; all was atomic and episodic, brilliant flashes rather than a steady light. His mind had nothing of the scientific in it, it was curiously insensitive to guiding principles, and each intellectual act was a new and unrelated effort. All his vigour would be switched on to this line or that, and there was no even diffusion of power simultaneously through many channels. As a consequence he was a bad administrator, for the art of administration is to hold many wires at once in the same hand; and he was oddly inept in military questions, where a so-called *flair* is nonsensical unless based upon a strong understanding of fundamental truths.

But without these faults it is probable that the world would not have had the benefit of his virtues, which to a notable degree were the qualities of his defects. The lack of ordinary knowledge saved him from the dominion of the ordinary platitudes. The fact that his mind was not a *continuum*, as the phrase goes, but a thing discrete and perpetually remade, kept him from lassitude and staleness. The world to which he woke each morning was a new birth of time to be faced with all the interest of the pioneer. And the fact that one subject must at the moment exclude all others, gave him in that one subject a terrific momentum, the one-ideaed energy and concentration which is a most formidable weapon in war. His loose hold on principles kept him from formalism, and opportunism is often the right attitude in a crisis. The whole combination — ignorance, volatility, ardour, absorp-

tion in the task of the moment, opportunism, adventurous interest — spelled that first of the virtues in a war Minister: *courage de tête*, fearlessness in the face of a swiftly changing world. He did not ask to see a map of the path; but he was prepared without reservation to grapple with any and all of the terrors of pilgrimage. Too much was made by his admirers of his imagination, which was narrow in its range and commonplace in its quality. Had it been more powerful his intellectual courage might have been less sure.

His character had much in common with his mind. He was essentially good-humoured and kindly; he was without personal vanity; he had no vulgarity in his composition, though he was shrewdly aware of it in others and knew how to use it. One obvious fault was that he had a temperamental dislike of straight roads, and preferred to reach even an easy goal by a roundabout course — a foible, perhaps, rather than a fault, and a mannerism rather than a vice, for there was little to complain of in the trait except its needlessness. A more serious charge was that he was a difficult colleague because of a kind of naïve disloyalty. He did not appear to trust any man fully, and he had little of that fine tradition of the public service by which a Minister is bound to stand by a subordinate. Whoever worked with him or under him worked with his flanks exposed to the sniper. Yet it seems probable that this charge, the commonest made against him, was exaggerated, or at any rate misconstrued. He knew so little about, and believed so little in, most forms of expert knowledge that he would seek it, when he wanted it, anywhere but in the proper department. During his first year as Prime Minister he evinced a strange timidity towards the press, and resorted often to undignified means to win its favour. He had not discovered, as he did later, that the press of Britain is, on the whole, a thing of honour and sound breeding, and that the way to earn its support is to earn its respect by independence. Also the journalist with his up-to-date knowledge in capsules was the kind of purveyor of intelligence that his tastes required, and he sometimes relied on him to the exclusion of better authorities. It was said, not without truth at the time, that the Government of Britain was Mr. Lloyd George and the last journalist he talked with.

The keynote of his character, as of his mind, was vitality, and his very defects ministered to this major virtue. He was a man of a myriad acquaintances, who rarely made friendships. Every one who came into contact with him was impressed by his resource and power, but few were attracted by personal charm, for of com-

mon human warmth there was little. All was given to the State, nothing was dissipated in the interests and ties which make up the lives of most men. Many of his talents and endowments, such as his parliamentary tact, his subtlety in the management of colleagues, his debating skill, even his remarkable eloquence, however invaluable to a statesman in normal times, were of less account in war. But one gift he had which is so rare and so inexplicable that it may rightly be called genius. In the darkest days his vitality soared above the fog and made a kind of light by its very ardour. He might be himself half-afraid, willing to toy with unworthy terms, impatient of the long view and the wise course, but that same magnetic effluence was there to inspire cooler heads and, it is possible, braver hearts. He could not be defeated, because his spirit of buoyancy and zest was insatiable, and therefore unconquerable. Such a being will be most fallible, compelling both admiration and despair, but to one who deserved so greatly of the commonwealth much will be forgiven.

The report issued by the War Cabinet on the first complete year of its work was a record of strenuous activity, not only in the prosecution of the war, but in many branches of imperial and domestic reform. It seemed, indeed, as if an itch for change had fallen upon Ministers and people, and far-reaching reforms, which had no conceivable relation to the war, were made in the franchise, in education, in Indian administration. It would have been well if some of these novelties had been postponed to a more leisured day, when their faults could have been expunged and their value increased. But if some things had been done badly, and many crudely, much had been done well. Mr. Bonar Law, in a speech in the House of Commons on February 13, 1918, set forth certain striking figures. In 1917 the Army had been increased by 820,645 men, and 731,000 men and 804,000 women had been placed in civil employment at home. A million additional acres had been brought under the plough. There were two million more quarters of wheat in the country than at the end of 1916. British shipyards had produced 624,000 more tons; and our ships were better used, for whereas before the war every 100 tons net of shipping brought to the country 106 tons of goods, they now brought 150 tons. Nearly two million more tons of timber had been produced at home. The number of guns available for France had increased by 30 per cent., and the supply of airplanes was two and a half times as great as in the preceding year. The War Cabinet and Mr. Lloyd George had justified their office, and though the former was in some re-



spects a glaringly imperfect mechanism of government, the ordinary citizen was not disposed to criticize it. If a machine is being used every hour of the day and night, it is difficult to overhaul and amend it. It was the loosest of bodies in its methods of consultation, being one long desultory discussion on every conceivable topic to which was summoned every conceivable type of consultant. That it did not break down was due mainly to its secretary, Sir Maurice Hankey, who laboured heroically to guide its steps towards the agenda of the day, and managed by tact and firmness to snatch decisions from the broad stream of irrelevant debate.

The War Cabinet was the supreme executive of the nation and its instructions were carried out by the various Ministers and departments; but there were certain special duties, arising out of the war, which either concerned many departments simultaneously, or were so novel that no machinery existed for their fulfilment. These had to be performed directly by the War Cabinet itself, and the burden of them fell principally upon two men. One was General Smuts, who showed in civil matters a versatility and an adroitness as conspicuous as his skill in the field, and a long-sighted patience which no trials of fortune could perturb. In a certain kind of informal diplomacy he was without an equal, and, just as a great advocate is often briefed in impossible cases, so General Smuts's competence induced the Prime Minister to saddle him sometimes with preposterous missions. The other was Lord Milner, who, from the start of the War Cabinet, had quietly borne the weight of its most difficult tasks. He was the foremost living British administrator, and no more powerful intellect and pure and resolute character have been devoted in our time to the public service. He cared nothing for popularity, and had no oratorical gifts; by a fortunate chance he was the natural complement in most things of the Prime Minister; and in spite of the strange malice with which he was still pursued by political opponents a great confidence in him was growing up in the nation.

The normal departments of Government were violently dislocated by the war, the duties of all were manifolded, and latent weaknesses were ruthlessly laid bare. On the whole they stood the test well, and under the pressure of necessity simplified their ritual and accelerated their speed. The most efficient was beyond doubt the War Office; it met new problems with an expansion which was natural, logical, and on the whole thrifty; and there were few abler servants of the State than men like Sir John Cowans, the Quartermaster-General, who modestly and unosten-



tatiously performed miracles. Contrary to general opinion the Foreign Office was not far behind. It is often an advantage for a department of State to be unpopular and derided, for it can do its work without those acclamations which turn the heads of their recipients. That official is, as a rule, the most effective whose very name is unknown in the market-place. The Treasury was less successful. War is a hard time for economists, and it is also to be said in the Treasury's defence that some of its ablest men were diverted to special duties. But, whatever the cause, the great spending departments were virtually uncontrolled, and the Treasury concentrated its efforts on squabbling over small increases in humble salaries, like some watch-dog that bites the milkman but fawns on the burglar. Money was poured out like water, for the prudent margin of safety in all types of war requirement was liberally interpreted. Also the creation of new Ministries and the extension of old ones seemed to inspire a passion for bureaucracy for its own sake, and departments contended with each other in the invention of new duties till almost every side of life felt the unwelcome hand of the State. One result was to cure the ordinary Briton of any communistic hankerings, and to revive with an intensity that was almost a passion the individualism of his forefathers.

Mr. Lloyd George's "business man" had now been on trial for a year. The day of his downfall was not yet, he was still a popular fetish, and what the jargon of the day knew as the "live wire" was still eagerly sought as a departmental head. The explanation of the phenomenon was that a people a little disillusioned with politicians turned to the extreme opposite—the plain man who did his work successfully without talking. It was the same romantic craving which the North showed in the American Civil War, when at the start it demanded "young Napoleons." But just as the North had to end with Grant, so Britain had to fall back for the bulk of the work on the civil servant. The reaction against the "business man" was speedy and violent, and it is not likely that he will be popular with the future historian. He was too richly rewarded for his modest labours; he was also too frequently a grotesque failure, lacking in knowledge, in tact, in judgment, in every quality of statesmanship. The truth is that the words "business man" were given a false definition. They did not mean only those who were in a true sense creators and captains of industries; at one time, judging by various appointments, they seemed to mean simply those who had made money. But a man who has

won a great fortune on the Stock Exchange, or in a mining venture, or by catching the public taste with a newspaper, or in any other form of gamble, may be without a vestige of administrative talent. And such in fact were more than one of the Government's discoveries.

But to the genuine "business man," the organizer and creator, the gratitude of Britain was deeply pledged. The Ministry of Munitions was guilty of blunders and wastefulness, but it performed a colossal task without which an Allied victory was impossible. Woolwich Arsenal employed 11,000 men in August 1914; in 1917 it employed 96,000. In 1914 Birmingham produced thirty Lewis guns a week; in 1917 the figure was 2,000. In 1914 we manufactured just over a thousand magnetos in the year; in 1917 we produced more than 126,000 for aircraft alone. The first credit for these achievements must go to the workmen, who toiled long hours at hard, monotonous labour, but the second belongs to the business men who staffed the Ministry and its endless local ramifications. That was one, perhaps the most conspicuous, case; but there were others. The Ministry of Shipping was a harmonious and efficient combination of the business man and the civil servant. The Ministry of Food, faced with a most vexatious and all but impossible task, had succeeded in so regulating the supply and distribution of the staple articles of diet that the winter of 1917-18 saw little hardship and no real want. This was largely the doing of Lord Rhondda, one of the principal Welsh coal-owners, who died in 1918, having sacrificed his life to his work as much as a soldier in the field. But if we seek for a dramatic instance of the value of the business mind in a Ministry, we shall find it in the department at the War Office of the Surveyor-General of Supply. In March 1917 Mr. Andrew Weir (afterwards Lord Inverforth), a Scottish shipowner, was commissioned to examine and report upon the contract and supply side of the War office. He made his report, and in May was invited to fill a new post, that of Surveyor-General of Supply, with a seat on the Army Council. His aim was to buy as economically as possible, but to buy enough, for any blunder meant a breakdown in the efficiency of the Army; therefore, instead of buying manufactured articles in small quantities a short way ahead, he bought raw material in large quantities direct in the country of origin. This put it beyond the power of any one to stint supply, and it saved sums running into hundreds of millions to the taxpayer. As one instance of his dealings—for the sum of 250 millions he bought the whole

Australasian wool clip for three years. His prices were a percentage on pre-war rates, and by introducing a careful costing system he limited the manufacturers' and dealers' profits. By an economy committee, which he established, he secured enormous savings, often by a simple alteration of pattern in an article of general use. By his salvage department he turned the débris of war into money. He bought also for the Allies of Britain, and it was largely his aid which enabled America to equip her great armies in time. Lastly, he converted the whole commercial side of the War Office to his methods, and in this case the business man and the public servant worked to one purpose in perfect amity and understanding.\*

The main preoccupation of the Government during these months was with the improvement of the fighting machine, chiefly in the direction of headquarters reform. Their intention was good, but they were unfortunate in some of their ventures, and consistently unfortunate in their treatment of personal questions. To take the Navy first: in December, as a result of an Allied Conference in Paris, an important step was taken by the creation of an Allied Naval Council, consisting of the various Ministers of Marine and Chiefs of the Naval Staffs, and provided with a permanent secretariat. On the 27th of that month it was announced that the First Sea Lord, Sir John Jellicoe, had retired, and that he was to be succeeded by Sir Rosslyn Wemyss, who had been acting since August as Deputy First Sea Lord. Of Admiral Wemyss's competence as a successor there was no question, but the cavalier treatment of the sailor to whom the country owed everything for the long vigil of the first two years of war brought upon the Prime Minister and Sir Eric Geddes, the First Lord of Admiralty, the censure of all lovers of fair dealing. Otherwise the naval situation had greatly bettered itself. In the beginning of February 1918 the First Lord, reviewing the result of twelve months of the unrestricted German submarine campaign, declared that in his opinion the danger had been met. The sinking of merchant ships had now been reduced to a lower level than before the German intensive campaign began, and this was not due to any decrease in the number of ships sailing. Merchant ships, too, were being built at a higher rate than in the best pre-war year, and it was hoped during 1918 to double that record year.

\* To gain some idea of the immense size of its transactions, take these items of goods manufactured by order of the Department—62 million pairs of boots, 130 million yards of serge and tartan, 276 million yards of flannel, 164 million pairs of socks, and 1,200 million sandbags.



The campaign in the air had produced one novel feature. The Zeppelin legend had been destroyed during 1916; but when on the 28th of November of that year an enemy airplane had visited London in the daytime and dropped bombs, it seemed probable that a new menace from the heavens might replace the old. In the summer of 1917 the Germans, having perfected in their Gotha type a heavy bomb-carrying machine, inaugurated a series of air raids on England. In June they came by day, and, taking us by surprise, did considerable damage. Presently we organized our defences, so that daylight raids became dangerous for the raiders; but the first moonlight of August saw the beginning of hostile night attacks which lasted throughout the winter. Generally the enemy chose the full moon, both for the purpose of finding his way and because bright moonlight is in itself a screen; but on at least two occasions he came when the moon was in its first or last quarter, and once he chose a moonless, starry night. At first he succeeded easily in penetrating the London defences; but soon the various zones of barrage became effective, and at the most one or two machines visited the capital. Bombs were dropped in every quarter of London, and rich districts suffered alike with poor. Comparatively little damage was done either to property or life; but the normal existence of the Londoner was disarranged, and elaborate provision had to be made for shelter during raids for the poorer classes who lived in flimsy buildings. The people of south-eastern England behaved admirably under this menace, scarcely permitting it to disturb the tenor of their life. There was no clamour to bring back machines for defence which were needed at the fighting fronts, and the enemy designs on British *moral* most signally failed. Meantime the old Royal Flying Corps and Royal Naval Air Service were united in one service known as the Royal Air Force, and an Air Ministry was established in November by Act of Parliament under a Secretary of State. The change was overdue, for the Air Services were getting into administrative confusion, and there had never been that efficiency in their home organization which had characterized their work in the field. Moreover the home side was losing caste, and becoming the refuge of the *embusqué* and the *arriviste* and the dregs of conscripted manhood. There was need of vigorous action if a great tradition were not to be fatally degraded, and a vital service impaired by weakness at the top. The first Air Minister, Lord Rothermere, was so unfortunate as to differ seriously from his technical advisers, and before he resigned himself had brought about the resignation of Sir Hugh



Trenchard, the Chief of the Air Staff, and Sir David Henderson, the creator of the service.

But it was on the Army that public attention was concentrated, and the critics of the Government found there their chief topic. The heavy casualty lists of Third Ypres, the crisis of Caporetto, the failure of hopes raised high by the first stage of Cambrai, were some excuse for those who doubted whether all was well with our military direction. It said much for the people of Britain that but little popular complaint was made against the chiefs of the Army themselves. There were the usual criticisms of the staff; but what staff in what war has ever escaped them? There was some murmur that the New Army and the Territorial Force were unfairly treated in the matter of promotion as compared with the old regulars. There were the stock tirades against elderly generals, not infrequently made by the coevals of these generals. In such complaints there was little substance. The British Army, as regarded commanders and staff officers, was the youngest in Europe; of the twenty members of the Intelligence section at General Headquarters nine were New Army and Territorial officers; an ex-civilian was chief staff officer of the Guards Division. But by far the commonest criticism was that the politicians were overriding the soldiers and sailors. The latter were popular; the former never had been and never would be popular in Britain. The plain man was anxious about certain appointments; he did not quite see why a newspaper proprietor should be Air Minister and a railway manager First Sea Lord; he was disturbed by the dismissal of Sir John Jellicoe; he was disquieted by constant rumours of intrigues against Sir Douglas Haig and Sir William Robertson. In any controversy he was vaguely on the side of the fighting men; and his instinct did him honour, for the soldiers and sailors can rarely defend themselves, and the politicians have the stating of the case.

The urgent question was that of the unity of command, and to understand this complicated matter it is necessary to note the stages of the controversy. From the first months of war the lack of some central coördination between the Allies had weighed on the minds of both soldiers and statesmen. France had proposed a Supreme War Council with executive powers over armies and fleets, but to this Kitchener was opposed, since he did not believe in the syndicating of command in the field. During 1915 the *modus operandi* was periodic conferences, like that in July at Chantilly which arranged the Champagne-Loos offensive, and that

in December of the same year which made the original plans for the Battle of the Somme. In 1916 there were conferences in March and November, and then with the appointment of Nivelle as the French Generalissimo the whole question changed its character. For a few weeks the Allied command in the West was unified in his hands, but his failure discredited the plan, and the two commands drew apart again. But the breakdown of Russia, and the certainty that Germany would soon move great masses of troops to the West, made it impossible to let the matter sleep. In June 1917 there was a conference in Paris of French and British soldiers, and it was proposed to set up an inter-Allied staff; but again the question dropped during the stress of the Flanders battle. Then came Caporetto, and the thing could be no longer postponed. The Conference of Rapallo on 7th November decided on the creation of a Supreme War Council to sit at Versailles — a scheme which Sir Henry Wilson had suggested a month before to Mr. Lloyd George. The Council was to consist of the Prime Minister and one other Minister of Cabinet rank from each of the Allies, with a permanent secretariat on the analogy of the British War Cabinet, and its duty was the co-ordination of national policies. The military side was represented by four permanent military delegates from France, Britain, Italy, and the United States, who attended meetings of the Council, but were not members and had no votes. This military committee was without executive powers, and all final decisions as to movements and strategy remained with the Cabinets concerned. Its business, as Mr. Lloyd George explained on 14th November in the House of Commons, was to help to co-ordinate military action by watching over the general conduct of the war, by preparing recommendations for the various Governments, and by keeping itself informed of their execution.

The Supreme War Council was therefore in the main a political body, and as such was a vast improvement on the old occasional conference. From it sprang united action in matters of shipping and transport, food and munitions, which did incalculable service to the Allied cause. But at present we are concerned with its weak point — the military arrangements, which in no way solved the problem and which unfortunately created a new difficulty. There are two ways in which allies can make war together. The commanders-in-chief may collaborate by sharing counsels and at prior conferences reaching an agreement on future operations — the plan hitherto followed by France and Britain; or an inde-

pendent generalissimo may be appointed, to whom the various commanders-in-chief are subordinate. There are two ways in which the thing cannot be done: by the putting of the army of one ally under the authority of the commander-in-chief of another, who has his own men to think of and is primarily responsible to his own government; and by a committee which has executive control over certain aspects of the fighting and not over others. The first of these had been tried in the case of Nivelle and had grievously failed; the second was now to be essayed. In the agreement establishing the Supreme Council there had been a clause introduced by Britain, which foreshadowed some such development, providing that the military representatives should be empowered to advise their governments independently of the General Staffs — a dangerous approach to dual control.

Clearly the military committee established at Rapallo was very far from the true unity of command that was required. By its constitution Chiefs of the General Staffs were excluded, and though Weygand, Foch's principal assistant, for France, Cadorna for Italy, Sir Henry Wilson for Britain, and General Bliss for America were a most respectable body, with direct access to the various Cabinets, they had not the authority of the men actually engaged in directing the war. In Mr. Lloyd George's speech in Paris on 12th November, in which he denounced patchwork strategy, had been a plea for a unified executive authority, which should decide upon the whole Allied strategy, and have at its disposal the whole Allied reserves. Soldiers both in France and Britain at the time were clear that the only solution was an independent generalissimo, but Mr. Lloyd George had expressly ruled out this expedient. "I am utterly opposed to that suggestion," he told the House of Commons. "It would not work. It would produce real friction, and might produce not merely friction between the armies, but friction between the nation and the Government."\*

The British Prime Minister's revised scheme was revealed at the meeting of the Supreme War Council at Versailles on January 30, 1918. By this time the German plans for the early spring were fairly clear, the American armies could not be looked for in strength till the autumn, and provision had to be made for a defensive battle against equal or possibly superior numbers. It was decided to create a general reserve of thirty divisions, and to entrust it to a Committee, with Foch, representing France, at its head, whose other members would be the permanent military rep-

\* *Parliamentary Debates*, Fifth Series, Vol. XCIX., p. 896.



representatives of Britain, Italy, and the United States. At the same time Mr. Lloyd George proposed a vigorous British offensive in Palestine. This latter plan, which was not approved of by Foch and Clemenceau, was based on a strange misapprehension of the gravity of the German menace and the value of successes in Asiatic Turkey. The day had passed when victory could be won, or even materially expedited, elsewhere than on the Western front. At a moment when Hindenburg was withdrawing his troops from Bulgaria and Turkey to weight his blow in the West, it was folly for Britain to extend instead of curtailing her side-shows — the more as she had no superfluity of shipping, and the amount required to maintain troops in the Near East was six times greater than for an equivalent number in France. As for the Executive Committee, it is not easy to see how it could have escaped disaster. The same authority that controls the general operations must control reserves, and a committee cannot with success command an army — these are elementary principles of the science of war. But the experiment was never tried; it shipwrecked upon Sir Douglas Haig, who, when asked to allocate divisions to the reserve, was compelled to refuse, since he had none to give.

Sir William Robertson was of opinion that the Chief of the Imperial General Staff should be the British representative on the Committee, and, since he could not always attend in person, should be permanently represented by a deputy. The Prime Minister thought otherwise; he wished wholly to separate the functions of the two posts; and Sir William Robertson was offered his choice between them. Holding the arrangement to be vicious in principle, he could not see his way to accept either, so on 16th February he resigned. He was succeeded as Chief of the Imperial General Staff by Sir Henry Wilson, who had been Deputy Chief of Staff to Sir John French in the beginning of the war, had afterwards commanded a corps, and had held various *liaison* posts with the French army. Sir Henry Wilson's political sympathies had not endeared him to the old Liberal Government, and he had therefore missed till thus late in the day the high and responsible employment which was the due of his great ability. For his remarkable natural gifts were not excelled in the British army; his experience was wide, his mind quick and resourceful, his courage conspicuous; especially he was an intimate friend of Foch and much trusted by the French Staff — a happy augury for the new co-operation. The Prime Minister and Sir William Robertson were men of incompatible temperaments, and their collaboration



was perpetually hindered by mutual suspicion. Sir Henry Wilson, on the other hand, was a man whom Mr. Lloyd George understood and valued, for he had many qualities akin to his own — unflagging optimism, for one thing, and a talent for explicit statement rare among tongue-tied soldiers. Both had a gift of making a situation seem clearer than in fact it was, and both lacked powers of judgment commensurate with their imaginative intuitions. In one respect the appointment was fortunate for the army; the new Chief of the Imperial General Staff could hold his own in debate with any politician, and the British forces in the field had in him a representative who, if he was sometimes in error, was always both able and willing to defend their cause.

Sir William Robertson had for two years laboured incessantly, and, after Kitchener, to him the creation of the new British army was mainly due. He will rank among the greater figures of the war, and no man earned more wholly the respect of his countrymen. His very limitations were an advantage to his popular repute, for they seemed to be added proofs of honesty. The departure of one whose massive figure had become a popular institution raised again the cry of "soldiers *versus* politicians;" and by a curious irony the extreme militarist theories were put forward chiefly by semi-pacifist newspapers. Undoubtedly the Prime Minister had given ground for distrust by the method of some of his appointments, which savoured of intrigue; and certain aspects of his policy — notably his slowness in handling the vital problem of man-power and his retention of too many trained divisions at home — had exasperated with good reason the much-tried High Command. On the question of the Versailles Executive he was most certainly in the wrong, and Sir William Robertson in the right. His Palestine scheme was only prevented by accident from proving a dangerous folly. But on the general issue there was something to be said in his behalf. In a democratic country the relations between soldiers and statesmen must always be delicate, and it may fairly be argued that they were less strained in Britain than in either France or Italy. The War Cabinet had not interfered with Haig as Jefferson Davis interfered with Lee before Fredericksburg, or as Lincoln, with more reason, interfered with every Northern general save Grant. In a democracy it is the civilian government which has the ultimate responsibility, which has to take into account a thousand matters outside the knowledge of the soldiers, and which, therefore, must decide on

everything but technical details.\* A wise government will trust its generals, or get rid of them; a wise commander-in-chief will take the view expressed by Lee in a famous letter to Davis.† Mr. Lloyd George was in the main justified in the claim which he made in his speech of November 19, 1917: "No soldiers in any war have had their strategical dispositions less interfered with by politicians. There has not been a single battalion, or a single gun, moved this year, except on the advice of the General Staff. There has not been a single attack ordered in any part of the battlefield by British troops, except on the advice of the General Staff. The whole campaign of the year has been the result of the advice of soldiers. Never in the whole history of war in this country have soldiers got more consistent and more substantial backing from politicians than they have had this year."

On the particular matters discussed in February 1918 he was in the wrong: wrong as to the Versailles machinery and the introduction of a dual authority; wrong in his anticipation of Germany's plans; wrong in his treatment of the British army in France and in the impossible task which he laid upon Haig. But for one of his temperament there were excuses to be made. He saw the danger of disunion and proposed a remedy; it was a bad one, but the soldiers contented themselves with criticizing. If on 1st February Robertson and Haig had demanded a generalissimo, being convinced that such was the right solution, and had proposed Foch, they would probably have carried their point, in spite of the Prime Minister's declaration of the preceding November. He might fairly have complained that he did not get sufficient help from his military advisers in the solution of his problems, and he turned naturally to the fertile, if occasionally fantastic, mind of Sir Henry Wilson. The Prime Minister, again, was flagrantly unjust to the Somme achievement, but he was right in his instinct that the day was past for hammer tactics and in his craving for more finesse and resource in the Allied plan.

Of another change made a little later no criticism was possible. The office of Secretary of State for War existed in order to harmonize the relations of civilian statesmen and military experts.

\* Cf. Sir William Robertson: "I used to estimate that of the total effort of which the nation was capable only 25 per cent. was purely military, the remaining 75 per cent. being of a non-military nature; and when asked sometimes what our chances of winning were, I would reply, 'Why ask me, with my 25 per cent.? Ask those who manipulate the 75.'"—*From Private to Field-Marshal*, p. 321.

† *Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, Vol. CVIII., p. 752.

It had been since December 1916 in the charge of Lord Derby, but on April 18, 1918, he succeeded Lord Bertie at the Embassy in France, and Lord Milner went to the War Office. There was need of such a man in such a place, for a month before the storm had broken in the West, the Allies had lost their gains of four laborious years, and the Channel Ports and Paris herself seemed to lie at the mercy of the enemy. The British Commander-in-Chief had told his men that their backs were at the wall, and that each must fight to the end; and Sir Douglas Haig was not prone to emotional speech. We turn now to that struggle of life and death between the Oise and the sea.

## CHAPTER XCII

### THE SOMME RETREAT

*March 21—April 5, 1918*

The Position at the Beginning of 1918—The War on a Single Front—Ludendorff's Scheme—The New German Tactics—German Dispositions—British Dispositions—The British Fifth Army—The Attack of 21st March—British Battle Zone pierced—Retreat of Fifth Army—The Somme Line relinquished—German Failure at Arras—Loss of Péronne and Bapaume—Desperate Position of Fifth Army—Foch appointed Generalissimo—Fight for Amiens—Second Failure at Arras—The Enemy stayed on the Somme—Close of Battle—Reactions in Britain—Summary of Battle—The True Responsibility.

IN the year 1809 Napoleon, having laid Austria prostrate, had the Continent of Europe at his mercy. Only Britain, outnumbered in fighting strength by five to one, maintained the contest. The great Emperor, freed from other needs, was able to turn his superb armies against that south-western angle of land which still defied him, and in 1810 Masséna's veteran troops swept through Spain and Portugal. Wellington had little to comfort him except the conviction that the Napoleonic Empire was rotten at the heart, "sustained by fraud, bad faith, and immeasurable extortion." He could not foresee that the next five years would be the years of Borodino, Leipzig, and Waterloo. Similar in some degree was the case of the Allies towards the close of March 1918. They had to face the onslaught of a mighty engine of war whose strength could now be directed to a single front. Inferior in numbers, inferior too in certain more vital elements of military power, they were doomed to see all their hard-won gains obliterated and to struggle desperately for time to recruit their strength. In 1810 Britain had been fighting for nearly two decades; in March 1918 the Allies had endured forty-three months of a far intenser strife. But as their need was the sharper, so was their relief the quicker. Wellington



had to wait four years for salvation; in four months the Allies had repelled the peril and set their feet at long last on the road to victory.

At the end of February 1918 the Eastern front had gone out of existence. Russia, disjointed and anarchical, lay helpless in the grip of harsh treaties, and Germany was able to bring westward sufficient troops to abolish the small Allied numerical superiority. Already she exceeded their numbers, and she could at will call up a further reinforcement which would give her a margin of more than a quarter of a million men. On the Allied side there was no chance of such immediate increment. The American forces were slowly growing, but at the normal rate of increase several months must still elapse before they could add materially to the trained numbers in the field, and it would be the autumn at least before they could form separate armies. France could make no new effort; indeed, her man-power was not far from exhaustion, and she could no longer keep her units at full strength. During the winter she had broken up more than one hundred battalions. There had been as yet no adequate recruitment from Britain to fill the gaps left by Third Ypres and Cambrai. The difficulty about drafts had been felt in 1917, in which year 380,000 fewer men were taken into the army than in 1916. By March 1918 Haig's infantry strength was less by 180,000 than on the same date the previous year. The mind of the Allies had become resigned to a defensive campaign for the spring, till America took her true place in the line, and it was assumed that the task would not be beyond their power. They believed that they would have to face a superiority of numbers; but they had faced greater odds at First Ypres and Verdun, and held their ground. Let the enemy attack and break his head against their iron barriers; he would only be the weaker when the time came for their final advance. Such was the common civilian view in France and Britain.

Far other was the mood of the German High Command. Sometime in February Ludendorff and Hindenburg met the Reichstag in secret session and explained their plan. They promised victory, complete and absolute victory in the field, before the autumn. The submarine campaign had not done all that had been expected of it, and it appeared that American troops could land in Europe. But they must come slowly, and during the next six months the Allies would have to fight their own battle. Now, if ever, was the hour to strike. German diplomacy and the German sword had

brought peace in the East, and in a little the same sword would lay prostrate the West. America's armies, when they arrived, would find no Allies to stand by the side of, and that great nation, bowing to accomplished fact, would see the good sense of coming to terms; for clearly by herself she could not fight Germany across three thousand miles of sea. But a price must be paid for such a triumph. The Army chiefs put it at a million German losses; on reconsideration, they increased their estimate to a million and a half. On 13th February Ludendorff told the Emperor at Homburg that "the coming battle was the greatest military task ever imposed upon an army, and could only be accomplished if the very last man was employed in the decisive conflict."

The Reichstag blessed the enterprise. The news of it spread among the German people, and a wave of new confidence surged across Central Europe. German diplomats in neutral countries raised their drooping heads, and the speeches of German statesmen took on a certain truculence. On 16th March, five days before the attack was launched, Helfferich delivered a lecture on "Germany and England." He told his hearers that the war would be decided not in distant parts of the globe, but on the battlefields of France. Where is Hindenburg? he asked. "He stands in the West with our whole German manhood for the first time united in a single theatre of war, ready to strike with the strongest army that the world has ever known."

To understand the mighty battle which followed it is necessary to examine in some detail the German plan. Let us consider first its general principles. Ludendorff's aim was to secure a decision in the field within four months. To achieve this he proposed to isolate the British army, by rolling it up from its right and driving it into the sea or pinning it to an entrenched camp between the Somme and the Channel—a Torres Vedras from which it would emerge only on the signature of peace. This done, he could hold it with few troops, swing round on the French, and put them out of action.\* His first step, therefore—which was known as the "Michael offensive"—must be to strike with all his might at the point of junction of Haig and Pétain. He assumed with some

\* The first inception of the scheme seems to have been in the end of October 1917. At a conference at Mons on 11th November three areas of attack were discussed—between Armentières and La Bassée; on either side of Verdun; and between Arras and the Oise. Ludendorff decided on the last, and on 17th December he ordered Hutier's XVIII. Army—the shock army—to the St. Quentin sector. See the study by an anonymous staff officer, *Kritik des Weltkrieges*, 1921; and Otto Fehr's *Die Märzoffensiv*, 1918, 1921.

justice that it would be a weak point, and that, since his plan would not be realized by his opponents and they had no unified field command, there was certain to be fumbling at the start. He saw that what he would do he must do quickly. "Time's winged chariot" would not wait for him. The German High Command did not at the time believe seriously in the Americans, for they reckoned that their arrival would be slow and their training imperfect; but it was the part of wisdom to take no risks. Moreover, the happy anarchy of Russia might not continue for ever.

Such being the great principles of his plan, what advantages could he command in its execution? The first was his powerful army. He had withdrawn six German divisions from Italy and several from the Balkans; he had ready for use half of the 1920 class of new recruits; and he had brought some half-million men from the East. What with captures from Italy and Russia, and those released from the Eastern front, he had an enormous concentration of guns, and he borrowed from Austria a quantity of batteries. At the beginning of the battle in total numbers he would slightly exceed the Allies; soon he would have a considerable superiority; and from the outset, served by his admirable railways, he had the power of achieving a great local predominance, since the most intricate railway network of France was inside the German front. In the second place, his position on interior lines gave him the possibility of strategic surprise. He could concentrate at some point in the angle of the huge salient running from the sea to La Fère, and from La Fère to Verdun. The Allies would, of course, be aware of this concentration; but till the actual attack they would not know on which side of the salient the blow was to fall. His dispositions would threaten the French in Champagne as much as the British before St. Quentin. Finally, the nature of the ground behind the British lines seemed to have been devised for his purpose. His aim was to roll up the British right, and in the process he would have the valley of the Oise as a defence against French flank attacks, at any rate for the first stage. Wheeling northward, he would then drive Haig beyond the Somme, and thereby pin him to an enclosure, while his main effort turned against Pétain. In its essence it was the familiar plan of a break in a line sufficiently wide to allow the two halves to be driven in from the centre. But the configuration of the battle-ground permitted the operation to be carried out in two stages. The rolling up of the British could be completed before the French came to their aid, and the British would be out of action before the attack developed on the French



half. Only, it must be done speedily and completely; there was no great margin of time in such a programme.

The German habit, inherited from Moltke, was to decide upon a general strategic plan, towards which they marched undeviatingly, but to allow a wide latitude for the choice of particular objectives once they were in touch with the enemy. Ludendorff had therefore a single purpose—to split the Allied forces, hem in the British, and defeat the French; and this was to be effected by breaking the British right centre. But he was prepared to let circumstances decide for him the best methods of securing his aim as the battle developed. Hence it was an injustice to the German High Command to say that they struck for Amiens or Paris or the Channel Ports. They struck for something far greater and more decisive than any geographical point. As the struggle went on, they seemed to be diverted towards minor objectives, but these were always subsidiary to their main purpose. Nor did they in fact relinquish that purpose till they were wholly out-manœuvred and defeated.

We may now set down the detailed scheme of the first step. Out of 192 German divisions in the West, more than half were concentrated against the British. The actual front of attack was from Croisilles, on the Sensée, to Vendeuil, on the Oise, a distance of over fifty miles. Against this line Ludendorff proposed to launch thirty-seven divisions — more than half a million men — as the first wave, to be followed by fresh troops in an endless wheel. It is clear from the way in which he disposed his forces that he believed he had detected certain weak sections on the British front. One was the two re-entrants of the salient at Flesquières, which had been left by the Battle of Cambrai; another was just north of St. Quentin, where the low hill of Holnon dominates the little valley of the Omignon; a third was between St. Quentin and the Oise at the ridge of Essigny, east of the Crozat Canal. At such points a reasonable advance would mean the capture of important tactical positions. He hoped by the end of the first day to have driven the British behind the upper Somme, and as a consequence, on the second day, to compel a general retreat of the whole line. On the third day he had arranged for a great attack upon the British pivot at Arras. Success there would mean complete disaster to the British right wing, and a disorderly retirement westward towards Amiens and the sea. Long before the French reserves, hastily brought from Champagne, could appear on the scene, he hoped to have cut all communication with the north and be facing



southward to take order with Pétain. His plan was, therefore, to win a series of tactical successes at once, which would presently open the road to a strategic victory. Of his three armies of assault the task of that on the left was purely tactical — to cut the coupling between Haig and Pétain; the centre and the right-hand armies had to make a break north of the Somme so as to command the river from Péronne to Abbeville, and then, wheeling north, to effect the major purpose.

The conception was bold and spacious, and based on sound principles of the military art. Apart from the strategic advantages we have referred to, Germany relied for success upon new tactics which, as we have seen, Hutier had first experimented with at Riga, and Otto von Below and Marwitz had proved at Caporetto and Cambrai. The history of the war was the history of new tactical methods devised to break the strength of an entrenched defence. To recapitulate a tale which was the *leitmotiv* of the whole campaign — Neuve Chapelle saw the first attempt at the use of artillery to prepare the way for an infantry wedge, and Festubert and the French attack in the Artois saw the failure of the method. Three months later Loos and Champagne witnessed the device of the broad breach, which was defeated by the depth of the German defences. Then came the Somme and the doctrine of "limited objectives," combined with a creeping barrage, a method which was sure in its result but slow and laborious in its working, and which could only achieve a decision against an enemy whose power of recruitment was shrinking. The defection of Russia altered the case, and the gradual pulverization of Germany's fighting strength became a futile aim in view of the fresh reserves of troops at her command. Cambrai had shown the dawn of new tactics, the tactics of surprise, and the mind of the Allied Command was working towards their development. But Germany was beforehand. Her problem was to discover tactics which would restore open warfare, and give the chance of an early decision; and she deserves all credit for a brilliant departure from routine, a true intellectual effort to re-think the main problem of modern war. And her credit is the greater inasmuch as she contrived to keep it secret, and, in spite of Caporetto and Cambrai, the Allied Staffs, until the battle was joined, had no accurate knowledge of her plan.

What that plan was may be briefly sketched. It was based primarily upon the highly specialized training of certain units, and may be described as the system of shock troops carried to its extreme conclusion. In practice it usually involved local superiority

of numbers, even a crushing superiority, but such was not its essence, and it was meant to succeed even when the enemy was in stronger force.\* The first point was the absence of any preliminary massing of troops near the front of attack. Divisions were brought up by night marches only just before zero hour, and secrecy was thus obtained for the assembly. In the second place, there was no long artillery "preparation" to alarm the enemy. The attack was preceded by a short and intense bombardment, and the enemy's back areas and support lines were confused by a deluge of gas shells. The assault was made by picked troops, in open order, or rather in small clusters, carrying light trench mortars and many machine guns, with the field batteries close behind them in support. The actual method of attack, which the French called "infiltration," may best be set forth by the analogy of a hand whose finger tips are shod with steel, pushing its way into a soft substance. The picked troops at the fingers' ends made gaps through which others poured, till each section of the defence found itself outflanked and encircled. A system of flares and rockets enabled the following troops to learn where the picked troops had made the breach, and the artillery came close behind the infantry. The troops had unlimited objectives, and carried iron rations for several days. When one division had reached the end of its strength another took its place, so that the advance resembled an endless wheel or a continuous game of leap-frog.

This method, it will be seen, was the very opposite of the old German massed attack, or a series of hammer blows on one section of front. It was strictly the filtering of a great army into a hostile position, so that each part was turned and the whole front was first dislocated and then crumbled. The crumbling might be achieved by inferior numbers; the value of the German numerical superiority was to ensure a complete victory by pushing far behind into unprotected areas. Advance was to be measured not by a few kilometres but by many miles, and in any case was to proceed far enough to capture the enemy's artillery positions. Obviously the effect would be cumulative, the momentum of the attack would grow, and, if it were not stopped in the battle zone, it would be far harder to stop in the hinterland. It was no case of a sudden stroke, but of a creeping sickness which might demoralize a hundred miles of front. Ludendorff's confidence was not ill founded, for to sup-

\* For example, at the Third Battle of the Aisne the 1st Guard Division successfully engaged within three days seven French divisions, and another German division at the battle of 9th June defeated three French divisions.

port his strategical plan he had tactics which must come with deadly effect upon an enemy prepared only to meet the old methods. Their one drawback was that they involved the highest possible training and discipline. Every detail — the preliminary assembly, the attack, the supply and relief system during battle — presupposed a perfect mechanism, and great initiative and resource in subordinate commanders. The German army had now been definitely divided into special groups of the best quality, and a conspicuously inferior rank and file. Unless decisive success came at once, the tactics might remain, but the men to use them would have gone. A protracted battle would destroy the *corps d'élite*, and without that the tactics were futile.\*

The German High Command, as was its custom before a great offensive, had created new armies. Their dispositions on the 21st March in the battle area were as follows: — From Arras southward lay the new XVII. Army (formerly the XIV. Army in Italy) under Otto von Below, the hero of Caporetto, with five corps, comprising twenty-three divisions. On his left, from Cambrai to just north of St. Quentin, with exactly the same strength, lay the II. Army of Marwitz, who had been in command during the battle of Cambrai. South of it, extending to the Oise, was the new XVIII. Army (of which the nucleus came from Woyrsch's group in the East) under Hutier, with four corps, embracing twenty-three or twenty-four divisions. Beyond lay Boehn's VII. Army, the right wing of which was to be drawn into the contest. All the divisions intended for the battle were taken out of the line in January and February for special training. Of the corps commanders, some, like Fasbender and Conta, were old antagonists, but the majority were new men in the West, who had learned their trade in Eastern battles. Hutier himself was of this school. Before the war he had commanded the 1st Guard Division; but in the present campaign he had done all his work in Russia, and, at the head of the German VIII. Army, had taken Riga. It was fitting that one of the men chiefly responsible for the new tactics should be present to direct their final test. Otto von Below was another of their begetters. He had first won fame at Tannenberg in August 1914,

\* Ludendorff has expounded the new doctrine in his *My War Memories* (Eng. trans.), II., pp. 573-582. A good statement of the main principles, which are now generally adopted, will be found in four lectures by Captain Liddell Hart at the Royal United Services Institution, reprinted under the title of *The Framework of a Science of Infantry Tactics* (Rees, 1921). Captain Hart's key-metaphor is "the expanding torrent."



and had thereafter commanded for two years the German VIII. Army on the left flank in the East. In November 1916 he took over the German forces in Macedonia, and distinguished himself greatly in the fighting at Monastir. In April 1917 he replaced Falkenhausein in command of the German VI. Army after the loss of Vimy ridge, and in September of the same year was put in charge of the new XIV. Army for the attack on Italy. There he remained until January 1918, when he joined the XVII. Army in France.\*

One special feature was to be noted in the German dispositions. The great stroke was designed not only to give Germany victory, but to revive the waning prestige of the royal house. So soon as the battle began it was announced that the Emperor himself was in direct command. The armies of Otto von Below and Marwitz were included in the group of Prince Rupprecht of Bavaria, but Hutier's army was in the group of the Imperial Crown Prince. It was a *Kaiserschlacht*, this blow which was to open the path to a "German peace." There was also a more practical reason for the arrangement. Ludendorff could exercise a closer control if the front of assault were divided between two groups than if one group-commander were in charge of the whole operation.

The position of the Allies in the face of such a threat was full of embarrassment. They were aware of what was coming,† and in view of their past record they were confident that they could beat off any German assault, even though it were made with a considerable superiority of numbers. But the enemy concentration in the angle of the great salient made it impossible for them to decide till the last moment against which section the attack would be delivered. The Germans took some pains to threaten the Champagne front and the Ypres area. Pétain, not unnaturally, was anxious about his position on the Aisne — which was, after all, for the enemy the shortest cut to victory; he feared, too, an attack through Switzerland by way of Belfort; and, since he held the exterior lines, any reinforcement of one part from another would be a matter of days. The difficulties of the British Command were still greater. Haig had not received from home the numbers for which he had so often pleaded, and he had been compelled greatly to extend the length of his front. Up to January 1918 the right wing of the British had been Byng's Third Army. Before the

\* The Below family is confusing. From Otto must be distinguished Fritz, who now commanded the I. Army in Champagne, and Eduard, who commanded the 5th Corps.

† Haig had begun to work on the supposition of an attack in the Péronne area as early as November 1917.



middle of the month, however, the Third Army was moved farther north, and the post on its right taken by Gough's Fifth Army from the Ypres area, which replaced the French in front of St. Quentin.\* About the 20th of January the Fifth Army extended its right as far south as the village of Barisis, on the left bank of the Oise, thus making itself responsible for a line of 72,000 yards, or nearly forty-one miles. The position was, therefore, that Britain now held 130 miles of line, and these the most critical in the West, with approximately the same numbers as she possessed two years before, when her front was only eighty miles long and Russia was still in the field.

Clearly this was a wildly dangerous extension for a weak force in an area which was one of the two possible objects of the coming enemy attack. The problem made Haig acutely uneasy. The Executive Committee at Versailles could give no help; its scheme of a pool of thirty divisions under Foch had failed, for, apart from its inherent unworkableness, the British Commander-in-Chief had no reserves to contribute. So it was provisionally arranged between Haig and Pétain that, in event of the western side of the salient becoming the principal battle-ground, the British reserves would be held mainly at the disposal of Byng's Third Army, while the French army south of the Oise would extend its left to assist Gough. Such a plan had obviously many drawbacks, but it was difficult for Haig to make a better, since the British Government, still dreaming of Palestine, would not realize the gravity of the crisis and increase his numbers, and Pétain could not be persuaded that the enemy threat was against the British right. To add to Haig's difficulties, he had to train his troops for the new defensive warfare, and the transition from offence to defence is one of the most critical tasks which a general can face. He had also to adapt his army to the new grouping of units under which divisions were changed from a thirteen-battalion to a ten-battalion basis — an unfortunate step to take under the threat of attack, since it involved an alteration in divisional and brigade machinery, but one rendered inevitable by the impossibility of receiving adequate drafts from home. Moreover, he had to prepare defences and communications in areas recently won from the enemy, and comprehensively scarred by battle.

His strategical problem, too, was intricate. He had to face an

\* This decision had been arrived at by the British and French Governments at Boulogne on September 25, 1917, but the discussion of the details occupied the whole winter. Clemenceau and Foch wished the British front to extend to Berry-au-Bac, on the Oise. Pétain was content with Barisis.

attack anywhere on a front of 130 miles, and from Arras northward his hinterland was so narrow and so vital that he could not afford to lose much ground. It was different between Arras and the Oise, where twenty miles might be relinquished without strategic disaster. He was, therefore, compelled to keep the northern and central sections of his front well manned and their reserves not far off, and he did not dare to weaken them for the sake of the Somme area, even though the omens pointed to that as the probable German objective. On this last point Haig and his Staff were not in doubt, for the British Intelligence Service was positive on the matter, and it was by far the best among the belligerents. Weeks before the battle the erection of huts for advanced general headquarters had been ordered in the Amiens district. The credit of foreseeing accurately the coming attack, which Mr. Lloyd George claimed in April, in Parliament, for the Versailles Council, belonged in reality to Haig and to Haig alone. Versailles was wildly in error. At the end of January its considered anticipation was that the attack would be delivered about the 1st of July and in the Lens area; the date was three months wrong, and the sector selected was the only part of the British front left in peace.

In the middle of March the British Third Army lay from just north of the Arras-Douai road to near Gouzeaucourt in the south. Byng had four corps — from left to right the 17th, under Sir Charles Fergusson; the 6th, under Sir Aylmer Haldane; the 4th, under Sir G. M. Harper; and the 5th, under Sir E. A. Fanshawe.\* His total front was something over 40,000 yards. Gough on his 72,000 yards from Gouzeaucourt to the Oise had four corps, comprising eleven divisions in line.† His front was so extraordinary that it deserves a fuller exposition. From Gouzeaucourt to Ronssoy, along the ridge which represented the limit reached by the German counter-attack at Cambrai, lay the 7th Corps under Sir Walter Congreve, holding a front of 14,000 yards with three divisions and one in reserve. From Ronssoy to Maissemy, covering the valley of the Omignon, was the 19th Corps under Sir H. E. Watts, holding a front of 10,000 yards with two divisions and one in reserve. In front of St. Quentin, from the Omignon to the canalized Somme, was the 18th Corps under Sir Ivor Maxse, with three divisions in

\* Byng had in line ten divisions — from left to right the Guards, the 15th, the 3rd, the 34th, the 59th, the 6th, the 51st, the 17th, the 63rd, and the 2nd; and in reserve the 4th, the 56th, the 47th, the 40th, and the 19th.

† The 9th, the 21st, the 16th, the 66th, the 24th, the 61st, the 30th, the 36th, the 14th, the 18th, and the 58th. In reserve he had the 39th, the 50th and the 20th infantry divisions, and two cavalry divisions, the 1st and 2nd.

line, and one infantry and one cavalry division in reserve. Its front was approximately 18,000 yards. On its right to the Oise lay Sir R. H. Butler's 3rd Corps, with three divisions in line and a cavalry division in reserve. This corps covered no less than 30,000 yards — an average of less than one bayonet to the yard; and the reason of such a disposition was that eleven miles of this last front, between Moy and the Oise, were supposed to be protected by the river and its marshes.

The terrain of the sixty miles held by the British Third and Fifth Armies was in the main a series of bare plateaux, split into fingers by broad valleys running east and west. In the north were the east-flowing streams of the Scarpe, the Sensée, and the Cojeul, and, farther south, the Cologne and the Omignon running west to the Somme, and the canalized upper stream of the Somme itself. There were few woods save in the neighborhood of Gouzeaucourt, and at Holnon, west of St. Quentin. The British front had no natural defences except on its right, where it ran along the Oise; but the early months of the year had been dry and the Oise marshes made only a feeble barrier. Behind its centre lay the Somme in its big bend towards Péronne, with a channel some sixty feet broad and four deep; but in the event of retreat the Somme was not a line to rally on, for its tortuous course made it easy to turn on the north. On the south the Crozat Canal joined it with the Oise and provided a good reserve position. The key-points on the Fifth Army front were the high ground at Essigny, Holnon, and Ronsoy, commanding respectively the Crozat Canal, the valley of the Omignon, and the valley of the Cologne. For the Third Army the danger points were the re-entrants of the Flesquières salient and the vital hinge of Arras.

The British Command attempted to atone for its weakness in numbers by devising defences of exceptional strength. The system, based on the German plan at Third Ypres, was adopted at a conference at Doullens on December 7, 1917. In front lay a "forward zone," organized in two sections — a line of outposts to give the alarm and fall back, and a well-wired line of resistance. In the latter were a number of skilfully-placed redoubts, armed with machine guns, and so arranged that any enemy advance would be drawn on between them so as to come under cross-fire. The redoubts were set 2,000 yards apart, and the spaces between were to be protected by a barrage from field guns and corps heavy guns. The line of resistance and the redoubts were intended to hold out to the last, and to receive no support from the rear except for such



counter-attacks as might be necessary. The purpose of the "forward zone" was to break up the advancing enemy, and the principle of its organization was "blobs" rather than a continuous line. Behind the "forward zone," at a distance of from half a mile to three miles,\* came the "battle zone," arranged on the same plan, except that it had no outposts. It was a defence in depth, elaborately wired, and studded with redoubts and strong points. A mile or two in its rear lay the final defensive zone, less elaborately fortified, and by no means completed when the battle began. The British Command had confidence in its arrangements, believing that the "forward zone" would break up the cohesion of any assault, and that the "battle zone" would be impregnable against an attack thus weakened. Consequently there were no adequate alternative positions prepared in the rear; indeed, considering the small number of men available, it was a stark impossibility for the army commanders to have provided such safeguards in the short time permitted. But a strong bridgehead position was in process of construction covering Péronne and the Somme crossings to the south. Certain arrangements also had been made in case of a comprehensive retreat, and orders had been issued well in advance for the destruction of the Somme bridges.

The two army commanders on the threatened front had each in his way a high reputation. Both were cavalymen, and both had done brilliant work in the campaign. Sir Julian Byng, as commander of the Canadian Corps, had taken Vimy ridge in April 1917, and it was he who had instituted the new tactics of surprise at Cambrai. Sir Hubert Gough, after a meteoric rise to fame in the first year of war, had commanded the Fifth Army at the Somme and throughout the long struggle around Bullecourt during the battle of Arras. At Third Ypres he had been given the leading part, and his army had borne the brunt of the heavy fighting in the first month of that action. But there he had somewhat failed in resource and judgment, and had squandered fine divisions against the enemy's defences without attaining his object. Hence his old reputation had become a little dimmed, and among his soldiers he had acquired the name of a general who tried his troops too high and used them blindly as battering-rams against the stoutest part of the wall. The criticism was not wholly just, but it was widely made, and as a result the Fifth Army had lost much of its confidence in its leader. So, when misfortune overtook it, Sir Hubert Gough was naturally blamed, though, as will be made

\* In the Flesquières salient the battle zone was five miles behind the forward zone.



clear in this narrative, he did all that man could do in an impossible situation. It was the failure at Third Ypres which, as is the fashion of such things, clouded his record in an engagement from which otherwise he must have emerged with a new credit.

The first weeks of March saw the dry, bright weather of a Picardy spring. As early as the 14th our aircraft had reported a big concentration well back in the enemy's hinterland, and the Third and Fifth Armies were warned of an approaching battle. Many raids undertaken during these weeks established the arrival of fresh enemy divisions in line, though no idea could be got of the real German strength; and from the evidence of prisoners \* it appeared that Thursday, the 21st March, was the day appointed for the attack. On Tuesday, the 19th, the weather broke in drizzling rain, but it cleared on the Wednesday, with the result that a thick mist was drawn out of the ground and muffled all the folds of the downs. That day was spent in an eerie calm, like the quiet which precedes a storm. When the sun set, the men in the front trenches were looking into heavy fog, which grew thicker as darkness fell. There was no warning of any enemy movement, scarcely even a casual shell or the sputter of outpost fire.

At about 2 a.m. on the 21st the British front was warned to expect an assault. The forward zone was always kept fully manned and at 4.30 a.m. the order was sent out to man the battle zone. Still the same uncanny silence held, and the same clinging fog, under cover of which all through the night the Germans were pushing up troops into line, till by dawn on the fifty odd miles of front between Croisilles and the Oise they had thirty-seven divisions within 3,000 yards of our outposts. Then, precisely at a quarter to five, the whole weight of their many thousand guns was released against the British forward and battle zones, headquarters, communications, and artillery positions, the back areas especially being drenched with gas which hung like a pall in the moist and heavy air. Twenty miles and more behind the line, even as far back as the streets of St. Pol, shells were dropped from high velocity guns. Nor was the shelling confined to the battle-front. The French felt it in wide sections east and north-east of Rheims; it was violent north of Arras and on the line between La Bassée and the Lys; Messines and the Ypres area were heavily attacked, and Dunkirk was bombarded from the sea. So widespread and

\* Two deserters from a trench-mortar company. See Ludendorff, *op. cit.*, II., p. 596.

so severe an artillery "preparation" had not yet been seen in the campaign. The batteries of the Third and Fifth Armies replied as best they could, but no gunner or machine gunner or artillery observer could see fifty yards before him. Communication by visual signalling, aircraft, or pigeons was impossible, and the only method was wireless, which was slow and uncertain. And under the same cloak of mist little parties of the enemy were everywhere cutting the wire and filtering between our outposts.

It was a perfect occasion for the new German tactics. The infantry advance was timed differently along the front. In one place it began as early as eight o'clock, and by ten o'clock it was general. The men in the outpost, beaten to the ground by the bombardment, and struggling amid clouds of gas, were in desperate case. In the thick weather the enemy was beyond the places where the cross-fire of machine guns might have checked him long before the redoubts were aware of his presence. The first thing which most of the outposts knew was that the Germans were well in their rear, and they were overwhelmed before they could send back warning. The S.O.S. signals sent up were everywhere blanketed by the fog. Presently the outposts were gone, and the Germans were battling in our forward zone. There the line of resistance did all that was expected of it. There garrisons and redoubts, till far on in the day, held on gallantly; messages continued to be received from many up to a late hour, until that silence came which meant destruction. The battle zone had been early manned, but the destruction of our communications kept it in the dark as to what was happening in front. Too often, too, in those mad hours of fog our batteries received their first news of the attack from the appearance of German infantry on their flank and rear. They fought heroically to the end, mowing down the enemy with open sights at point-blank ranges. About one o'clock the fog lifted, and then the German airplanes, flying low, attacked with machine guns our troops and batteries. The men in the battle zone could only wait with anxious hearts till the shock of the assault should reach them.

Before eleven o'clock the army commands had tidings that the enemy was through our forward zone on the extreme right opposite La Fère, where it had been vainly hoped that the Oise marshes gave security. Then came news that the same thing had happened north of the Bapaume-Cambrai road and at Lagnicourt and Bullecourt. At noon came a graver message. The Germans were in Ronsoy — inside the battle zone. They had taken Tem-

pleux le Guérard, and Hargicourt and Villeret, and were now in contact with the rear defences of the battle zone, and threatening to break through down the valley of the Omignon. On the flanks of this area they were still held. The 24th Division was still defending Le Verguier, which was in the forward zone, and the 21st Division had not yielded a yard at Epéhy. At the Flesquières salient, too, where the attack had not been pressed, the forward zone was intact. But the grave fact remained that by noon, with these exceptions, the German infantry had everywhere reached our battle zone, and at Ronssoy had bitten deeply into it. Presently they were into it at the supposed impregnable section on the south between Essigny and Benay, and at Maissemy, above the valley of the Omignon. At the last point, however, they were held by the 24th and 61st Divisions with the aid of troops from the 1st Cavalry Division. On the Third Army front the enemy had reached the battle zone at various points between the Canal du Nord and the Sensée. He had taken Doignies and Louverval, was on the edge of Lagnicourt, and farther north was in Noreuil, Longatte, and Ecoust St. Mein. The gallant 9th Division, on the left of the Fifth Army, was still maintaining its ground; the 17th Division was in position astride the Canal du Nord; and at Lagnicourt the 6th Division was holding the first line of the battle zone.

In the afternoon the situation developed most gravely south of St. Quentin. The enemy was in Fargnier by four o'clock, and in the evening pressed in the 58th Division and captured Quessy, at the south end of the Crozat Canal. Farther north the 18th Division, assisted by troops of the 2nd Cavalry Division, held their ground in the battle zone, and even in the forward zone, till about midnight the stand of the latter was broken. Between Benay and the Somme Canal the 14th Division was forced back to the last line of the battle zone, though isolated detachments were still resisting east and north-east of Essigny. Around Roupv and Savy, where the Germans attacked with tanks — huge things mounting the equivalent of a field gun, but unwieldy across country — the 30th Division stood firm in the battle zone and took heavy toll of the advancing enemy. On the rest of the Fifth Army front the battle zone was intact, though hard pressed at Ronssoy, and the 9th Division still held their forward positions. In the Third Army area the heaviest fighting during the afternoon took place around Demicourt and Doignies and north of Beaumetz, where the famous 51st Division was engaged. Lagnicourt fell, and for a moment it was believed that the enemy would break through be-



tween Noreuil and Croisilles. He reached St. Leger, and attempted to outflank the 34th Division at Croisilles. By the evening this attack had failed, as had the attack against the 3rd Division on the left bank of the Sensée.

As the night fell the pressure still continued. It had been an amazing day. Against nineteen British divisions in line the enemy had hurled thirty-seven divisions as a first wave, and, before the dark came, not less than sixty-four German divisions had taken part in the battle — a number considerably exceeding the total strength of the British army in France. Adding the reserves of the Third and Fifth Armies, we get a total of thirty-two divisions against sixty-four; and, as a matter of fact, many British divisions engaged during the day three or four German. The forward zone had gone, except in parts in the area of the 9th Division, but the battle zone remained, though at Essigny and Ronssoy and Noreuil it had worn perilously thin. The greatest total advance of the enemy was some 8,000 yards on our extreme right. Counter-attacks to recover key points were out of the question owing to our lack of reserves, and the most we could do was to maintain our thin lines intact and prevent a break through. Our aircraft had warned us that the enemy was concentrating huge masses for the second day of the battle. It behoved us, therefore, to rearrange our front. On the right of the Third Army the 5th Corps was retired from the Flesquières salient, and this involved a withdrawal by the 9th Division, which so far had scarcely yielded at all. Byng's line now ran in that area along the upland known as Highland Ridge, and then westward along the old Siegfried Line to Havrincourt and Hermies. On the right of the Fifth Army the 3rd Corps was withdrawn behind the Crozat Canal, and this meant that the right division of the 18th Corps, the 36th, had to retire to the Somme Canal. With the dark the fog thickened, and all night long the work of destroying the canal bridges went on. The enemy was close up, and in some cases the destruction parties were annihilated before they could perform their work, so a few bridges were left practicable for the German infantry.

It had been a day of sustained and marvellous heroism — outposts resisting to the last; batteries fighting with only a man or two in the gun teams; handfuls desperately counter-attacking and snatching safety for others with their own lives. But it had taken heavy toll of our troops in dead and prisoners, and the remnant was very weary. Our front was now freed from any marked salient, and the barrier of the Somme and Crozat Canals had



strengthened the critical section in the south. But the Fifth Army was still outnumbered by four to one, and there was no prospect of help yet awhile. The fog grew thicker in the night, and at the dawn of Friday, the 22nd, it was as dense as on the previous morning. Hence we could not use our artillery with effect on the German masses, who at the first light began to press heavily on the whole battle-ground.

It soon became clear that the enemy's main effort was against the Fifth Army, especially at the three critical points of the Cologne and Omignon valleys and the Crozat Canal. Early in the morning Hutier had reached the canal at Jussy, and by 1 p.m. he had crossed at Quessy and was pressing on to Vouel. The 58th Division made a great stand at Tergnier, but lost that village before the evening. In the afternoon the Germans crossed the canal also at La Montagne and Jussy, but were driven back by the 18th Division and the 2nd Cavalry Division. At the gate of the Cologne river Marwitz was as far west as Roisel, where the 66th Division held their ground for a time. South of the valley, however, Le Verguier had fallen by 10 a.m., and to the north Villers Faucon soon followed, so that both Roisel and Epéhy were threatened from the rear. Accordingly the 66th Division was withdrawn to the third defensive zone between Bernes and Boucly, where they were supported by the 50th. The 21st Division was also retired from Epéhy, and on its left the 9th Division was brought back with great difficulty to the third zone between Nurlu and Equancourt. By the afternoon almost the whole of the Fifth Army was in the third defensive position.

Throughout the day Byng held without serious trouble his new line in the Flesquières salient, but he had to face severe attacks between Havrincourt and the Sensée. The 17th Division made a gallant defence at Hermies, which was virtually outflanked; and the 51st Division and a brigade of the 25th stood firm in the Beaumetz area. In the late afternoon the 34th Division had at last to fall back from St. Leger; but on its left the 3rd Division retired its right flank to a front facing south-east, and held the enemy. Under enormous handicaps the Third Army contrived during the day to yield little ground, and to exact a high price for every yard.

But it was otherwise with the Fifth Army. Each of its divisions had to hold on an average half as much front again as those of the Third Army, and Byng's reserves were twice as strong. By midday the German masses were forcing the gate of the Omignon, where the loss of Maissemy and Le Verguier had seriously weakened

our line. Division after division pressed to the attack, and presently the whole of Gough's centre was out of the battle zone. We were driven from the ridge at Holnon, and in all that section the divisions in line were forced back behind the third zone of defence, where the two reserve divisions, the 20th and the 50th, took over the front to enable the others to reorganize behind them. In this most hazardous retreat the 36th (Ulster) Division fought with especial brilliance. By 5.30 p.m. the enemy was everywhere attacking the final zone. The 30th Division, on a front of over 10,000 yards, for some hours held up the assault between the Cologne and the Omignon, but in the evening it was pressed back from Poeuilly, and suddenly it found its right flank turned. For, south of the Omignon, a gap had opened between the right wing of the 50th and the left of the 61st and 20th Divisions. Through it the Germans poured, and broke the third zone around Vaux and Beauvois.

That which the British Command most dreaded had come to pass. The last reserves had been thrown in, and, save for one French division, which arrived in motor busses, and some French cavalry now busily engaged at the Crozat Canal, there was no help available for the hard-pressed Fifth Army. Pétain still believed that the attack was a feint and that the real menace was in Champagne, but he ordered the French 5th Corps, under General Pellé, of three divisions and a chasseur battalion, to take up ground on Gough's right. In the meantime, however, the gap could not be stopped, so at all costs the British front must withdraw. At 11 p.m. that night Gough gave orders to fall back to the bridgehead position east of the Somme, a position which, as we have seen, was not yet completed. Maxse's 18th Corps was to retire to the Somme line south of Voyennes, keeping touch with the 3rd Corps on the Crozat Canal. Watts's 19th Corps and Congreve's 7th Corps were to hold the Péronne bridgehead on a line running from Voyennes through Manchy Lagache to Vraignes, and thence continue in the third zone to the junction with the Third Army at Equancourt. Byng had to fall back to conform, his front now running from Equancourt east of Metz-en-Couture, and then in the third zone to Henin-sur-Cojeul, whence the old battle zone was continued to Fampoux. His retreat was not seriously threatened, but it was otherwise with Gough. All through the thick night the divisions of the Fifth Army, now in the last stages of fatigue, retreated under constant enemy pressure, covered by rearguards from the 20th, 50th, and 39th Divisions. In such a retirement complete

order was impossible, and it was certain that gaps would be left in the new front. Weak points appeared at Mory in the Third Army's centre, and at Ham in the area of the 18th Corps, and the morning was to give us news of them.

During the night Gough was faced with a momentous decision. The Crozat Canal line was yielding, and his right flank was in danger; he had fallen back to a position where the defences were weak and unfinished; he had intelligence that the whole German hinterland was packed with fresh troops; and he saw no hope of reinforcements for several days. His men, strung out on an immense front, had been fighting without rest for forty-eight hours. If he faced a general engagement on the morrow he might suffer decisive defeat. There seemed no course open to him but to abandon the Péronne bridgehead and fall back behind the Somme. It was a difficult decision, for, in the words of the official dispatch, "it greatly shortened the time available for clearing our troops and removable material from the east bank of the river, for completing the necessary final preparations, for the destruction of the river and canal bridges, for re-forming west of the river the divisions which had suffered most in the previous fighting, and generally for securing the adequate defence of the river line." But the alternative was certain disaster, and beyond doubt in the circumstances his judgment was right. Accordingly, very early in the morning of Saturday, 23rd March, instructions were given to the 19th Corps to withdraw gradually to the river line, while the 7th Corps, on its left, was to take up position between Doingt and Nurlu. The latter front just covered Péronne, and had behind it, flowing from north to south, the little river Tortille.

The withdrawal began on Saturday morning, and was undertaken in the face of incessant attacks from an immensely superior enemy. That day was perhaps the most difficult in the whole annals of the British army. Gaps, as we have seen, had already opened in the front taken up the night before, and the task of retreat was everywhere complicated by the enemy's presence at points in the rear. It was open warfare with a vengeance, and often it seemed that the whole British line had lost cohesion, and had been jolted into a number of isolated detachments. Hutier began by increasing his hold west of the Crozat Canal. He forced a crossing at Jussy, and by some means or other got his tanks over. A little later, in spite of the stout resistance of the Canadian Cavalry Brigade, he had crossed at Mennessis, and by noon was advancing on the west bank. The French division sent by Pellé had failed



in their counter-attack towards Tergnier, and all afternoon the enemy was slowly pressing in the 3rd Corps among the wooded uplands between the Somme and the Oise. Farther north there was trouble at Ham, which the Germans entered in the early morning; and, owing to the incomplete destruction of the bridges, they succeeded during the day in crossing the river there and at Pithon. In the afternoon the resistance of the 20th and 61st Divisions prevented them from advancing farther on the southern bank. The right wing of the 18th Corps was swinging slowly towards the Somme, fighting delaying actions, in which the Ulster Division again distinguished itself.

The retreat of the 19th Corps succeeded better than might have been expected, considering the difficulties of a weak force retiring in daylight in the face of great numbers, and the 50th Division did conspicuous work in covering the withdrawal. By 3.15 p.m. the whole corps was across the river, and most of the bridges had been destroyed. The water was low, the adjacent marshes dry, and the depression in which the stream ran was sixty feet below the level of the downs on the eastern shore; but the position offered some degree of protection. The Germans tried to cross at Offoy and Béthencourt during the afternoon, but were repulsed; and all evening their troops, descending the bare slopes on the east, were heavily punished by our guns. North of Ham no German had crossed the Somme by nightfall.

Meanwhile Congreve, on the left, was in serious danger. The 7th Corps was holding a front just covering Péronne on the high grounds towards Nurlu and Equancourt. During the morning its left withdrew from Nurlu to the line of the Canal du Nord north of Moislains. This caused a gap between it and the right of the 5th Corps in the Third Army, of which the enemy promptly took advantage. Gallant attempts to restore the position were made by divisions of the Third Army, but the gap widened hourly. The result was that the 7th Corps, late in the afternoon, was forced west of Péronne across the Tortille to the high ground around Bouchavesnes and south of Sailly-Saillisel. It was now back on the old Somme front held by us before the German retirement in March 1917. Its extreme weakness made its line crack into fissures, which the Germans searched for and widened, so that ere night began its front was not established, and was still slowly giving ground. It was the beginning of that attempt to divide the Third and Fifth Armies which presently became the immediate strategic objective of the enemy. In this and subsequent fight-



ing the debt of the British infantry to the Royal Air Force could not be overstated. So long as the light endured they kept at bay all enemy machines, which otherwise might have discerned the nakedness of the land.

This gap compelled the 5th Corps also to retire. Its right was forced back first to the Four Winds Farm, south of Ypres, and then, in spite of a great stand by the 47th Division, to a position east of Rocquigny. Farther north the rest of the Third Army had a day of desperate battles. Its centre lost La Bucquière and Beugny after a long struggle, in which the 19th Division played a gallant part. At Vaulx Vraucourt the 41st Division managed to hold its line against six separate assaults for which the enemy brought up cavalry and guns. The gap at Mory was temporarily closed by the recapture of that village by the 40th Division; and, west of St. Leger, the 31st Division repulsed two German divisions. The evening saw the centre and left wing of the Third Army still standing firm, though in some danger from the retirement of its right flank. At Arras a curious thing had happened. That morning Otto von Below had designed a great attack upon our pivot there — an attack which in the German plan was known as the "Mars offensive." Realizing the danger, Byng had withdrawn his troops beforehand from the exposed position at Monchy. The enemy directed a violent bombardment on our old lines; but his infantry, when they advanced, found them empty. This completely upset the German plan, and the attack was postponed till the heavy guns could be brought up for the destruction of our new front.

That evening the German bulletins announced that the first stage of the great battle had ended, and that a large part of the British army had been defeated. They claimed 25,000 prisoners and 400 guns. In three days they had advanced at the deepest point about nine miles. That morning, as if to signalize their triumph, they had begun the shelling of Paris with long-range guns, emplaced in a wood near Laon some seven miles inside the German lines.\* A gun firing at a range of nearly eighty miles was a new thing in war, though its feasibility had long been known to the Allies. It was a *tour de force*, designed only to weaken the *moral* of the French capital, a task in which it most conspicuously failed. But it was a warning to the Allies that Germany was devoting every energy to her final offensive, and would leave no method untried to break her foe. So far she had succeeded greatly, but

\* The guns had a life of less than one hundred shots. They were laid at 50 degrees, and a shell went to an altitude of twenty-five miles.

not beyond her expectations. Indeed, Ludendorff was some way behind his programme. On the evening of the 23rd he had done little more than reach the positions which he had promised himself for the night of the 21st, and, though he had worn the British line to a shadow, he had not yet broken it.

Nevertheless, on that Saturday evening, Haig had food for anxious thought. He had arranged with the commanders of the First and Second Armies to organize a special force of reserve divisions, and he hoped soon to have the Canadian Corps for use on the Somme. Also that afternoon Pétain had agreed to take over the front south of Péronne, with the result that the 3rd, 18th, and 19th Corps passed under Fayolle. The group of the latter contained the First Army under Debeney, on Gough's right, and the Third Army, under Humbert, to the south of it. But the adjustment of commands did not create fresh troops, and the French reserves in any strength could not appear for a day or two, since the bulk of the French First Army under Pétain's curious arrangement was coming from the neighbourhood of Toul. In the meantime parts of the British front were obviously at cracking point. The Fifth Army was worn out, and, though for a moment the 3rd, 18th, and 19th Corps had found a sort of line, they were too weak to stand on it for long. The flower of the German forces, the 1st and 2nd Guard Divisions, and the 5th and 6th Brandenburgers were advancing against them. The 7th Corps was in desperate straits west of the Tortille, and was barely in touch with the right of the Third Army. There lay the worst danger, and any moment might bring news of a breach on a broad front. Giddy with lack of sleep, grey with fatigue, tortured by the ceaseless bombardment, summoned at almost every hour to repel attacks on flank and rear, the British troops had shown a fortitude beyond all human praise. But wars are fought with body as well as with spirit, and the body was breaking.

On Sunday morning, 24th March, the mist was as thick as ever. The battle of that day had two main features — a fight for the Somme crossings, and an effort to fill the breach between the Third and Fifth Armies. On the left of the Third Army there was little movement, and the serious pressure was all south of the Bapaume-Cambrai road. On the right of the Fifth Army, where the French had now two infantry divisions and one cavalry division in line, supported however by little artillery, the 20th and 36th British Divisions were forced back from Cugny and Eaucourt to

the neighbourhood of Guiscard. This withdrawal, which was most difficult owing to the presence of the enemy on their flanks, was made possible by the brilliant work of the 6th Cavalry Brigade. The French just north of the Oise were gradually pressed behind Chauny, and in the evening were withdrawn to the ridge above Crepigny, whence our line ran north-west, covering Guiscard and Libermont.

The 18th and 19th Corps battled all day for the Somme crossings. The enemy extended the gap at Ham, pressing back the 61st Division in a south-westerly direction towards the Libermont Canal. Here our gunners did wonderful work, often not limbering up and retiring till all our infantry had passed through them. Farther north a gap at Pargny was widened, so that the left flank of the 20th Division was in the air. The enemy reached Morchain, and the 20th withdrew to the canal. Beyond the gap the 8th Division, the first British reserves to arrive in support, made a stout resistance on the river line. Early in the morning the Germans had crossed at St. Christ and Béthencourt, but at these points had been held. The left of the 8th Division stood firm during the day; but its right, owing to the pressure from Pargny, had to be retired west of Morchain. The dry weather had seriously weakened the barrier of the Somme. It was now fordable at almost any point, and the undergrowth of the valley provided excellent cover for the German advance.

In all this confused and difficult fighting the work of the artillery and the cavalry was not less brilliant than that of the infantry divisions. In the 3rd Corps area especially, troops of the 2nd and 3rd Cavalry Divisions, mounted and dismounted, covered every section of the retreat. So vital was the need of mounted troops that several yeomanry regiments which had recently been dismounted were hastily provided with horses. Without such assistance, in the words of the official dispatch, "the enemy could scarcely have been prevented from breaking through the long and thinly held front of broken and wooded ground before the French reinforcements had had time to arrive." Brilliant, too, was the work of the British tanks, which suffered indeed great losses but saved many desperate situations, lying in ambush till the last moment and then, in the words of their commander, emerging "like savage rabbits from their holes."

By the evening the Somme line between Epenancourt and the Péronne bend was still held by us. Péronne had fallen, and from there to north of the Bapaume-Cambrai road was fought the



most critical action of the day. At dawn the Germans had reached Bus, Léchelle, and Le Mesnil, and during the morning they were in Sailly, Rancourt, and Cléry. This thrust compelled the evacuation of Bertincourt; but north of that village, though Mory fell, the Guards and the 3rd and 31st Divisions managed to maintain a substantial front. Barastre and Rocquigny were held by the 17th and 47th Divisions till late in the afternoon, but the exposure of their right flank forced them to fall back in the evening. For the breach between the two armies at the bend of the Somme was widening. Early in the afternoon the enemy entered Combles, and pressed over the high ground at Morval towards Lesbœufs. The left division of the Fifth Army, the 9th, struggled desperately just north of the river. Its South African Brigade at Marrières Wood, north of Cléry, repeated its exploit of two years before at Delville. It held the wood till 4.30 p.m., when its ammunition was gone and less than 100 men unwounded remained. The brigade ceased to be, but its sacrifice delayed the enemy advance at its most crucial point and saved the British front. Few greater exploits were performed in the campaign.\*

There was no other course but for the right and centre of the Third Army to make a comprehensive withdrawal. The 4th and 5th Corps were ordered to fall back to the line Bazentin-LeSars-Grévillers-Ervillers. It was a task of supreme difficulty, for the enemy, working round their right flank, was already between them and their new positions, and it was made possible only by the heroic work of the machine gunners of the 63rd (Royal Naval) Division. The left of the Fifth Army was in worse case, for the remnants of the 9th and 21st Divisions were being pushed rapidly along the north bank of the Somme behind Cléry. At this moment the 35th Division, which had arrived at Bray-sur-Somme, and various composite battalions scraped in the Albert area, came to their relief, while the 1st Cavalry Division reached Montauban from the south. This enabled a line to be defended from the river at Hem through Trônes Wood to Longueval.

But the position at nightfall was very grave. The enemy had driven a deep and broad wedge into the centre of the British front. While the 19th Corps was still on the Somme south of Péronne, the 7th Corps was six miles farther west, and the 5th Corps had swung back precariously to conform. When the dark fell the line of the latter was Bazentin-High Wood-Eaucourt l'Abbaye-Ligny-

\* The story may be read in the present writer's *History of the South African Forces in France*, chapter viii.



Thillooy. Bapaume had gone the way of Péronne, and the British were well to the west of the front won in the Battle of the Somme. Farther north, the 4th Corps lay between La Barque and Ervillers. It was all a bad emergency line without prepared fortifications. Moreover the two armies were not properly in touch, nor were the 4th and 5th Corps, nor were the divisions themselves. There were many gaps which, during the thick night, the enemy was diligently exploring.

Some adjustment of command was necessary, and Congreve's 7th Corps, now north of the Somme, was put under Byng. When the morning of Monday the 25th dawned it became clear that the main German effort would be made between Ervillers and the river at Hem. During the night there had been strong assaults on the left of this front about Sapignies and Behagnies, and shortly after dawn an attack between Favreuil and Ervillers was repulsed. The 42nd Division retook Sapignies, and the stand of the 2nd Division at Ligny-Thillooy saved the situation during the morning. But at noon the attack was renewed in great force, and the right of the 4th Corps, which had lost touch with the 5th Corps, was slowly bent back west of Grévillers and Bihucourt. Just north of the Somme the 7th Corps, though its left flank was in the air, succeeded in holding its ground in spite of the advance of five German divisions. But in the 5th Corps zone between Montauban and Ervillers it soon became clear that the front was crumbling. In spite of a gallant stand by the 63rd Division, the various units, which were out of touch with each other, began to straggle back towards the Ancre. In the afternoon the enemy was in Courcellette, and pressing on to Pys and Irles, thereby turning the flank of the 4th Corps. At Beaucourt some of our men were already west of the stream.

Orders were accordingly issued to take up the Ancre line. The right wing of the Third Army, now the 7th Corps, fell back to positions between Bray and Albert, just covering the latter place; the 5th Corps held the river-bank from Albert to Beaumont Hamel; the 4th Corps withdrew to the line Bucquoy-Ablainzevelle, linking up with Haldane's 6th Corps at Boyelles. This left a gap between Beaumont Hamel and Serre, which promised trouble for the next day. Reinforcements, however, were now reaching the Third Army area; and the German thrust was weakening, partly from the fatigue of the divisions of attack and partly from the difficulties of transport over the old Somme battle-ground.

Meanwhile the rapid retreat of the Fifth Army had fatally

compromised the situation beyond the Somme. Everywhere the line of the river south of Péronne had gone, all reserves had been drawn into the fight, and in the area of the 18th and 19th Corps there was no hope of immediate succour. Each hour our front grew longer and the weariness of our men greater. In the 3rd Corps area, however, the French were arriving. Guiscard had fallen during the night, and early on the morning of the 25th a strong attack developed against the Allied position on the spurs east of Noyon. The French and British batteries north of the Oise Canal were withdrawn by 1 p.m. south of Appilly, with the help of dismounted troops of the Canadian Cavalry Brigade. All afternoon there was bitter fighting there, and by the evening the 18th Division had retaken the village of Babœuf. But the Germans, pressing south-west from Guiscard, entered Noyon before the dark fell, and this compelled all our front east of the town to retire south of the Oise. During the night the withdrawal was successfully effected. The French were now appearing in such strength that it became possible to take the remnants of the 3rd Corps out of the line and send them north to help the Fifth Army.

That army, now consisting of only two corps, was all day in tragic straits. At Licourt there was a gap between the 18th and 19th Corps, which grew wider during the day. The enemy entered Nesle, and forced the 18th Corps back to the south bank of the Ingon River and west of the Libermont Canal, while the right of the 19th Corps was pressed back towards Chaulnes behind the blazing ruins of Marchélepot. The left wing up till midday was holding the east bank of the canal between Villers Carbonnel and Barleux, but this had now become an impossible salient. Accordingly, during the evening, the 19th Corps was brought back to the line Hattencourt-Estrées-Frise, under cover of a counter-attack south of Biaches by the 39th Division. The gap between the two corps west of Nesle was ever broadening, and early in the night the Germans had reached Liancourt Wood, when a brigade of the 20th Division, brought up from the south and now reduced to 450 rifles, made a brilliant stand, and enabled the rest of the division to fall back towards Roye.

That evening the British front was disposed in a series of overlapping salients. The French in the old 3rd Corps area were farthest east; then the 18th and 19th Corps stood out in a long projection from Liancourt to Frise; while north of the Somme, in a still wider salient, the right wing of the Third Army rested on the Ancre. The enemy seemed to have every prospect of separating the British

and French forces about Roye, the Fifth and Third Armies on the Somme, and the 5th and 4th Corps at Serre.

The moment was far too solemn for half measures. A divided command could not defend the long, lean front of the Allies against the organized might of Germany, directed by a single brain toward a single purpose. Hitherto they had only toyed with the problem. Versailles was a useful step, but no advisory council could provide the cure for disunion, and the Executive Committee was doomed from the start. One strong hand must be on the helm, and one only. It is fair to say that the opposition to the appointment of a generalissimo had not come from one Government alone; all the Allied Governments had fought shy of it; the British Prime Minister, while an enthusiastic advocate of Versailles, had stopped short of the final step. But now the iron compulsion of facts had broken down the barriers. On the 23rd Haig, after seeing Pétain, telegraphed to London asking that the Chief of the Imperial General Staff should come out at once. At the request of the Prime Minister Lord Milner also crossed the Channel on the 24th. Next day he met Pétain and Foch at Compiègne, and found the former still anticipating a German attack elsewhere and unwilling to stake too much on the Amiens area. On Tuesday, the 26th, Milner and Sir Henry Wilson met Clemenceau and Poincaré, Haig, Foch, and Pétain at Doullens, the meeting being only achieved with difficulty owing to the confusion of the roads. That conference, held amid the backwash of the great retreat, marked in a sense the turning point of the war. The proposal for a supreme commander-in-chief, strongly urged by Milner and supported by Clemenceau, was accepted by Pétain and welcomed by Haig. For the post there could be only one choice. Sir Henry Wilson's first idea that Clemenceau should be appointed the nominal generalissimo was abandoned, and Foch was unanimously chosen. He was by universal consent the master mind among the Allied generals. The most learned and scientific soldier in Europe, he had shown his greatness in the field at the Marne and First Ypres; but for long his genius had been hampered, partly by professional jealousies, partly by the exponents of that political game which he wholeheartedly despised. Not since November 1914 can it be said that he had been used as his qualities deserved. His guiding hand had been present at the Battle of the Somme; but during the first half of 1917 he had suffered from the confused relations between the Army and the politicians. The Versailles Council had brought him again to the front; but he was born for greater things than staff



work. Now the Allies in their extremity turned with one accord to the slight, grizzled, deep-eyed man of sixty-six, who during a laborious lifetime had made himself a finished master of war. That evening it was announced that Foch had assumed control of the forces in the West.\* This narrative will record how nobly the new Constable of France fulfilled his trust.

The General-in-Chief had been found; but on that Tuesday morning it looked as if presently he might have no armies to command. The situation just south of the Somme was all but desperate. Unless reserves could be found it seemed certain that the gossamer line of the 19th Corps must break. It must fall back still farther; and, if help did not come, the way to Amiens was open. On the 25th Gough had begun to collect a motley force, made up of stragglers, details returning to units, the *personnel* of a machine-gun school, army troops, tunnelling companies, and Canadian and American engineers; and on the 26th, under the command of Major-General Grant, the Chief Engineer of the Fifth Army, they prepared the old line of the Amiens defences from Mezières by Marcelcave to the Somme at Hamel. Later, Brigadier-General Sandeman Carey, an officer of field artillery returning from leave, was put in charge, and commanded the detachment throughout the subsequent fighting; so that his name has become identified with the performance. But the credit of the inception and organization of the force belongs to Gough and the Fifth Army staff. These were the sole reserves available for this most vital section, and, since the 19th Corps could not be expected to hold any new enemy advance, orders were given to withdraw slowly from the Hatten-court-Frise line to the position Le Quesnoy-Rosières-Proyart, and to link up with the Third Army at Bray.

The Fifth Army was now fighting entirely on virgin soil, which no enemy had trod since the Western front was first established. The Third Army, in one part at least, was in the same case. During the morning of Tuesday, the 26th, the enemy poured through the gap between Beaumont Hamel and Puisieux, and occupied Colin-camps with machine guns. These were silenced, however, by the

\* The formula was: "Le général Foch est chargé par les gouvernements britannique et français de coordonner l'action des armées alliées sur le front ouest. Il s'entendra à cet effet avec les généraux en chef, qui sont invités à lui fournir tous les renseignements nécessaires." On 3rd April, at Beauvais, Foch was given "la direction stratégique des opérations militaires." But the Commanders-in-Chief had still the complete control of tactics and the right of appeal against Foch to their respective Governments. It was not till 24th April that Foch received the "commandement en chef des armées alliées."



field artillery of the 2nd Division, which galloped into action and engaged them with open sights. In the afternoon the New Zealand Division, which had just come up, retook Colincamps, and on their left a brigade of the 4th Australians filled the breach between Hébuterne and Bucquoy, thereby protecting the right flank of the 4th Corps. At Colincamps there appeared for the first time a weapon which was destined to play a great part in subsequent battles — the light British "whippet" tank.

Our front north of Albert was now more or less stable. On the right of the battle-ground we had to face a strong German thrust west and south-west from Nesle. The intention of the enemy was to divide the British and French forces, and by the speedy capture of Montdidier to prevent the detraining of the French reserves. The 18th Corps was now west and north of Roye, and from Hatten-court up to the Amiens-St. Quentin road the 19th Corps was being gradually driven back by repeated assaults. It was the strangest fighting. Each antagonist was utterly tired, and attacks and counter-attacks were carried out at a slow walk. Men fell down helpless from fatigue, and both sides took unwounded prisoners, who were simply paralyzed with weariness. This withdrawal, combined with the retreat of the French south-west of Roye, left a breach in the front, into which were flung the 36th and 30th Divisions, who had been taken out to rest on the previous day. The Germans reached Erches, and, though their flank was turned, the Ulster Division at Andechy managed to hold out till the afternoon of the next day, thereby compelling the enemy to check the speed of his advance. It was a matter of the most urgent need to stave him off from Montdidier as long as possible. Farther north, at Le Quesnoy, a hundred officers and men of the 20th Division, detailed to cover the withdrawal, kept the Germans at bay until six in the evening; only eleven survivors returned from this new Thermopylæ. At nightfall the gap had been partially closed, and touch had been found with the French, the line south of the Somme now running from Proyart by way of Rouvroy to Guerbigny. Hutier was now some five miles from Montdidier. The situation was still most anxious; but one thing had happened to disquiet the German High Command. Their front of assault was being narrowed. Fayolle's thrust from the south-west had shepherded the enemy north by west from the heights of Noyon. He no longer had the Oise to protect his left wing, and, when he reached Montdidier, he would have an exposed flank of some twenty miles.

But the British centre on the Somme was in evil case. In the

opening stage of the retreat the Fifth Army had embarrassed the Third; it was now the turn of the Third Army to put the left of the Fifth in jeopardy. The 7th Corps, on Byng's right, had taken up the Bray-Albert line by the morning of the 26th, and that day, at Méaulte, the 9th Division had beaten off many attacks. But the corps commander misunderstood Byng's plan. He thought that the Bray-Albert line was only a temporary halting-place, and that it was his business to retire to the Ancre. Accordingly during the afternoon he fell back, and had gone too far before the army staff realized what had happened. The result was that that evening the 7th Corps rested on the Somme at Sailly-le-Sec, while the 19th Corps across the river were at Proyart, five miles farther east. This uncovered the flank of the Fifth Army, and gave the enemy the chance to cross and take it in rear. An emergency force of 350 men with Lewis guns and armoured cars was detailed to watch the fords.

The result of this misunderstanding appeared early on Wednesday, the 27th. From 8.30 a.m. onwards the enemy attacked everywhere south of the Somme, and all day the British and the French toiled desperately to delay his progress to Montdidier, and to defend a line which would keep Amiens from bombardment. In the south Hutier captured Lassigny and its heights. Farther north he took Davenescourt, and entered Montdidier. From Arvillers to Rosières the 20th, 30th, and 24th Divisions held their ground during the day, and the 8th Division defended Rosières against all attacks. Thence to the river, however, there was something not far from disaster. The enemy crossed the Somme between Chipilly and Cerisy, and so turned our position at Proyart. Heavily attacked in front also, the 19th Corps fell back, leaving Proyart, Framerville, and Morcourt in German hands. The enemy tried to push south in its rear, and troops of the 1st Cavalry Division were brought across the river from the Third Army to occupy Bouzen-court. Battalions of the 50th and the 8th Divisions (the latter also now engaged at Rosières) made a gallant stand south-west of Proyart, and the 66th Division counter-attacked at Framerville. The position at nightfall was that our front ran from Rosières east and north of Harbonnières, and then north-west to Bouzen-court. But it could not stand for long, for the enemy was still filtering across the river in the ill-omened gap.

North of the Somme that day the situation was better. During the night of the 26th-27th the enemy had entered Albert, and had won a footing in Aveluy Wood across the Ancre. During the

27th, however, he failed to increase his hold west of the stream, and was unable to debouch from Albert, where we held the line of the railway embankment. From midday onward he attacked the 4th Corps between Bucquoy and Hamelincourt, and gained possession of Ablainzeville and Alette, but the 62nd Division, the 42nd, and the Guards maintained the rest of the front intact. Except on its right wing, the Third Army was now in a position of fair security, but it was aware that presently the storm would break on the Arras pivot.

On the morning of Thursday, the 28th, there began that stage in the battle in which the immediate enemy objective was the capture of Amiens. The original plan had been for Otto von Below and Marwitz to break through north of the Somme and roll the British towards the sea, while Hutier formed their flank guard to ward off the French. But they had failed to break Byng; on the other hand, Hutier had found a weak point, and it was resolved to exploit his success and take Amiens.\* The Germans, as in 1870, delivered their main attack along the high ground to the south-west, split into shallow valleys by the streams of the Doms, the Avre, and the Luce, which with the Somme and the Ancre make up the Five Rivers of Picardy. It was difficult ground for the defence, for the streams in this dry spring were no barrier, and the narrows between the Luce and the Avre were a trap which might well be fatal to a weak army. Ten miles west of the Avre ran the great Calais-Paris railway, the main route for the lateral communications of the Allies. Beyond it there was nothing but a single line till Beauvais was reached. If the enemy won the heights beyond the Avre he could at once put the trunk railway out of use. It had already been crippled by nightly German bombing raids; but guns west of Moreuil would make it wholly untenable. The same advance would bring the enemy within twelve miles of the centre of Amiens. If Hutier could cut the line before the French reinforcements detrained, he would have a clear road to the city. It was true that his plan had partially miscarried. He had hoped to divide the British and French forces when he had still the Oise to guard his flank, and every day that success tarried made his situation more risky. But there was yet time for a complete

\* The decision was reached by Ludendorff at 9.30 a.m. on 23rd March. It meant the temporary relinquishment of the greater strategical plan in favour of a lesser, and as such was opposed by the Imperial Crown Prince, who wished to use the fifteen fresh divisions still in reserve for the attack north of the Somme. — See *Kritik des Weltkrieges*, 1921.



break through, if only he cut the Paris line before it could be used to bring up any serious reserves. The capture of Amiens would follow, and the thin curtain of the British would be torn like tissue paper. But he must make haste, for his army had marched thirty-eight miles from its starting-point, was short of food and munitions, and a long way ahead of its heavy guns. The position was too like the days before the Marne to be free from disquiet; but, on the other hand, the French had then been retiring on their base, and now their retreat was in an eccentric direction.

The 28th was a critical day everywhere from Arras to the Oise. Let us look first at the much-harassed centre. During the night enemy bands worked southward from Cerisy and Morcourt, took Warfusée-Abancourt and Bayonvillers, and got astride the Amiens-St. Quentin road. This compelled the 19th Corps to swing back, pivoting on its right, to the line Vrély-Marcelcave, where the force which we may call "Carey's Detachment," with the 1st Cavalry Division in close support, continued the front to the river. It was presently clear that a more comprehensive retirement was necessary, for the position of the 18th Corps in the narrow salient between the Luce and the Avre could not be maintained. The Germans were attacking hard at Marcelcave; they were in Guillaucourt and pressing southward; and they had turned our right flank by the capture of Contoire. The 61st Division, brought up in motor busses from the south, attempted to relieve the pressure by a counter-attack at Warfusée-Abancourt, but failed to stem the tide. Accordingly we fell back through the 20th Division, which held the line Mezières-Démuin, and at nightfall were everywhere on the line of the old Amiens defences.

That day marked the end of the stand of the Fifth Army. The divisions which had suffered most were withdrawn and sent to the Abbeville area to refit. Its commander, Sir Hubert Gough, was directed to supervise the construction of new defence lines in the rear, and the force between the Somme and the French was rechristened the Fourth Army, and put under the command of Sir Henry Rawlinson and the old Fourth Army staff. The British line was once again wholly in the charge of Sir Douglas Haig. The new Army, when constituted, held only the short line from the Somme to the Luce, and to begin with was composed of Carey's Detachment, some cavalry, and the few divisions which had come up during the battle.

Meantime Fayolle was hard pressed, and on his front various British units were also engaged. Pétain had been slow to con-



vince, and his nervousness about Paris prevented his arrangement with Haig being carried out accordingly to the agreed time-table. Frequently the Germans were the first to arrive at the French detrain stations. The original plan had been that the French should take over the whole front south of the Somme, but the British line was now seven miles south of the river. The day began with the line running from Warvillers by Arvillers to just west of Montdidier. It was steadily forced back to the Avre and the Doms ; but south of Montdidier a counter-attack stayed the enemy progress and retook the villages of Courtemanche, Mesnil St. Georges, and Assainvillers, which had been lost. Farther north the French were driven out of Démuin and Moreuil. Between Montdidier and the Oise, at Pont l'Evêque, they counter-attacked successfully, driving the enemy back two miles on a front of six. So far Hutier had failed to get within range of the Paris railway, and the French reserves were coming up. Meanwhile Foch was furiously busy collecting reserves from his whole front, and the first fruits of his work appeared that day when a French Colonial Division came into line west of Montdidier. It was a proof to the enemy that his days of grace were fast vanishing.

He had another proof at the northern end of the battle-ground. Between seven and eight o'clock on the morning of the 28th Otto von Below hurled his weight on Arras. His guns had been brought up, and the attack originally staged for the 23rd was now delivered. The front of assault was across the valley of the Scarpe from the neighbourhood of Gavrelle to as far south as Puisieux. Its immediate object, as was learned from captured documents, was to recover Arras and the Vimy ridge, and its larger purpose was to free the German armies from a front now growing too narrow for their comfort. Below had three fresh divisions north of the Scarpe, besides the two in line ; against Arras he had four divisions ; while southward towards Serre no less than eleven divisions were disposed for the attack. The British forces were the 13th Corps north of the Scarpe, under Sir H. de B. de Lisle, on the right of Horne's First Army ; and from Arras to Bucquoy, Sir Charles Fergusson's 17th Corps and Sir Aylmer Haldane's 6th Corps.

The morning was fine, and the enemy had not his old advantage of fog. The advance was made after a short but very fierce bombardment, and was met by our guns firing under perfect conditions of weather. Indeed, before zero hour we had broken up with our artillery the masses assembling on Greenland Hill. Everywhere the enemy attacked with the greatest resolution, in some

places in six lines shoulder to shoulder, offering superb targets for our gunners. The weight of the shock carried him through gaps in our outpost line, but he was firmly held long before he reached the battle zone, while the outpost garrisons turned their machine guns and caught him in rear. North of the Scarpe the 4th and 56th Divisions, and, south of the river, the 3rd and 15th Divisions, repelled the enemy — the two latter divisions fighting on the very ground where they had won renown at the Battle of Arras the year before. After midday the Germans began a new bombardment, and late in the afternoon attacked again north of the Scarpe, but with no better result. At the end of the day we had our battle zone untouched, and were able by counter-attacks to push out a new outpost line in front of it. The surviving garrisons of the old forward zone had for the most part fought their way back through the enemy to our lines. Otto von Below's great effort was a complete and disastrous failure, and the spasmodic attacks on the rest of the Third Army front were no better fated. The Guards, the 31st, the 42nd, the 62nd, and the 4th Australian Divisions beat off all attacks from Boiry to Bucquoy. Only on the extreme right had we yielded a little ground, falling back south of Dernancourt to the line Méricourt-Sailly-le-Sec. The German check at Arras marked the end of the main battle so far as concerned the front north of the river. For a week and more there were local encounters, but Byng was now out of danger.

South of the Somme, however, things were still critical. On the morning of Friday, 29th March, the new Fourth Army had achieved some semblance of a line; but it was still desperately weak in men. Its immediate problem was to disengage its weary units, and the only reinforcements available were some of the divisions of the 3rd Corps, which had had only the scantiest period of rest. That was one danger; the other and the greater was the furious pressure on the French, for the enemy was beginning to put his chief weight into the attack between Moreuil and Noyon, where his communications were easier than in the devastated Somme battlefield, and it was still doubtful whether sufficient reserves for Fayolle would arrive in time. On the 29th the Germans attacked from Démuin southward, and the French were driven out of Mezières, though in the Montdidier region they were able to retain the villages which they had recaptured on the previous day. During the night the Germans won Moreuil Wood, which we retook on the morning of the 30th; we lost Démuin, but later in the day recaptured it and Moreuil village. It was

confused fighting, for the British were inextricably mixed up with the French, and the British cavalry have never been seen to finer advantage. The 1st, 2nd, and 3rd Cavalry Divisions and the Canadian Cavalry Brigade, together with the 66th, the 20th, and 50th Divisions, and the 3rd Australian Division, though they had to yield ground, established a line from the Luce northward. South of that stream the front was still in a state of flux. The enemy won the ridge west of the Avre at Aubvillers, Cantigny, and Mesnil St. Georges, and retook Monchel and Ayencourt. Towards Lasigny the French stood firm, and even made some progress.

On Easter Sunday, the last day of March, the situation was grave, for the French reserves were still slow in coming. During the morning the Germans attacked between the Luce and the Avre, and captured Hangard, from which they were presently ejected. Farther south the Allies were driven back to the railway station at Moreuil; but a fine attack by the British 8th Division enabled us to recapture the wood north-east of the town. On the heights of the Avre the French retook Grivesnes, and, south of Montdidier, they re-entered Monchel and Assainvillers. That day saw the end of the worst anxiety, for Fayolle had been strongly reinforced. On the 1st of April the British 8th Division and troops of the 2nd Cavalry Division won back some of the high ground north of Moreuil and in the evening the British forces there were relieved, the French taking over the front as far north as the village of Thennes, on the Luce.

Then for two days came a lull. On the 4th of April Hutier made a last attempt to break through at the junction of the two armies. On the British front south of the Somme, from the river to Hangard, the assault was made at 7 a.m., and succeeded in driving back the left \* of the Fourth Army west of Hamel and Vaire Wood, which lay south-west of the village. From the Amiens-St. Quentin road to the Luce the right wing stood firm. The pressure on the French, however, compelled it in the afternoon to withdraw a little in Hangard Wood. Fayolle had to face a determined thrust by fifteen divisions, which virtually drove him out of the angle between the Luce and the Avre, and pressed him back to the west of the latter river behind the high ground on which stood the hamlets of Castel, Morisel, and Mailly-Raineval. Farther south his front held, and repulsed all attacks at Grivesnes. The Germans were now within a couple of miles of the Paris railway;

\* This was no longer Carey's Detachment, which had been relieved on 31st March.



THE SOMME RETREAT.  
(Facing p. 212.)





# THE SOMME RETREAT.

(Facing p. 215.)



but its importance was not so great, for the French reserves had come into line. The British resistance on that day was highly creditable, and the dense masses of the enemy offered them the chance of a wholesale destruction. Most notable was the work of the gunners of the 3rd Australian Division north of the Somme, who from beyond the river protected our left flank at Hamel, and engaged the enemy over open sights.

Ludendorff had fixed the 4th of April as the close of the battle, but on Friday, 5th April, it was renewed on the southern front, and for a moment, too, flared up north of the Somme. Here the Germans advanced with ten divisions between Bucquoy and Dernancourt, but though they gained a little ground at these two places and at Beaumont Hamel, our line was never seriously shaken. Indeed, their losses were so utterly out of proportion to their gains that the day may be reckoned as an enemy defeat. South of the Somme he had no better fortune. There was severe fighting around Hangard; but the Germans failed to advance anywhere, and on the ridge west of the Avre the French made appreciable gains. On the southern front of the long salient, between Montdidier and Noyon, they advanced their line north of Orvillers Sorel and of Mont Renaud. On Saturday, the 6th, enemy attacks south-west of Montdidier and in front of Noyon at Mont Renaud were repulsed; but it became necessary for the French to withdraw their troops from the ground they still retained on the right bank of the Oise. They retired across the river south of Chauny to the line Normezière-Pierremande. Two days later the extreme right of their battle-front fell back under strong enemy pressure to the Ailette.

The retreat from the Somme was at an end. The Allied front had been established, and the road to Amiens was for the moment closed, though the enemy held a position on the high ground west of the Avre and on the plateau of Villers Bretonneux, from which, when he was ready, he could renew the attack. For the present he had exhausted his strength in the Somme area, and had thrown into the battle many weak divisions which had been already engaged. He had increased, too, the length of his front by thirty-five miles. The German High Command was now compelled to reconsider their purpose and to seek to achieve it by a blow in another quarter.

The Allied nations had faced the peril with an admirable calmness and courage. There was little recrimination, no hint of panic, and a very general drawing together of classes and a girding of

loins to meet any demand which the future might bring. America increased her recruiting, and strained every nerve to quicken the dispatch of troops, so that she might soon stand in line with her allies. Mr. Lloyd George and M. Clemenceau appealed to President Wilson, and no appeal was ever more nobly met. Mr. Baker, the United States Secretary of War, was fortunately in France at the time, and could judge the situation for himself. Meantime, General Pershing postponed his plan of a separate American sector of operations, and offered to Foch every man, gun, and lorry which America had in Europe to do with as he pleased. France, unshaken by a menace which struck at her very heart, showed that quiet and almost prosaic resolution to win or perish which two years before had inspired her troops at Verdun. In Britain the threat of industrial strikes disappeared. The workers forewent their Easter holiday of their own accord in order to make up by an increased output for lost guns and stores. It looked as if the good spirit of 1914 had been reborn, when men spoke not of rights or interests, but of what service they might be privileged to give to their country. In January the new man-power proposals had been introduced; but by the end of March they seemed comically insufficient. On Wednesday, 10th April, by a majority of 223, the House of Commons passed a Bill raising the limit of military age to fifty, and giving the Government power to abolish the ordinary exemptions, and to extend conscription to Ireland. Two divisions and other units were transferred from Palestine to France, and a contingent from Salonika. Moreover, the old doctrine of the necessity of keeping a certain force inside our shores to protect them from invasion was summarily abandoned, and within a month from the 21st of March 355,000 men were sent across the Channel.

We may pause to consider this first stage in the ultimate struggle, the first battle in the last German offensive. From the enemy point of view it represented a qualified success. The Allied front was for the moment re-established, but it was deplorably weakened; and the Germans, though their losses were very high, had now a total superiority of some thirty divisions in the West, and a fresh mass of manœuvre of at least twenty-five divisions. Ludendorff had not realized his full conception, but he had still the power to win if he had the skill. The first bout was over; but there were others to come, and the Allies were far indeed from safety. The gate of Amiens had been shut, but the next blow might shatter it. One thing was already clear — the splendour of the British performance. The fight had begun with an attack by sixty-four German

divisions on thirty-two British. By the end of March seventy-three German divisions had engaged thirty-seven British. By 9th April the total British force in action had grown to forty-six divisions of infantry and three of cavalry, and against them more than eighty German divisions had been launched. The disparity was in reality far greater than two to one, for, owing to the German power of local concentration, in many parts of the field the odds had been three or four to one. After the second day we had no prepared lines on which to retire, and the rivers parallel to our front were useless from the drought. Again and again a complete disaster was miraculously averted. Scratch forces, composed largely of non-combatants, held up storm-troops; cavalry did work that no cavalry had ever done before in the history of war; gunners broke every rule of the text-books. The retreat was in flat defiance of all precedent and law, and it succeeded only because of the stubborn valour of the British soldier.\*

The cause of the defeat — for defeat it is, when two armies fall back thirty miles with heavy losses, and have the enemy's will imposed on them — was not any blunder of strategy on the part of the British High Command. Haig, with the troops at his disposal, could not have done otherwise than he did. He could not keep adequate reserves at every point, and he was right not to thin the northern sections. It is true that there were no good alternate lines behind his front, but he had not had the time or the men to construct them. From no fault of his the third defensive zone was a farce, and the Péronne bridgehead too weak to be of service. Nor can the situation be reasonably blamed upon Pétain. He had good reason to believe that the Rheims area was threatened, and the enemy's exact intention could not be determined till the battle was joined. He was stubborn in his own forecast, and, it may fairly be said, a little obtuse; but he had grave national responsibilities to remember, and, in the absence of a generalissimo, it was natural that they should preoccupy his mind. Finally, no fault can be found with the work of the commanders of the two British armies or of the eight British corps. It is hard to see how they could have continued to hold the Péronne bridgehead, and the failure to destroy the Somme bridges was due not to lack of foresight but to a trick of malevolent fortune, like the morning fogs and the dry marshes of the Somme and the Oise. The one patent

\* To realize the greatness of the battle it is instructive to compare it with Verdun. There, between 21st February and 21st March, 1915, the French had to face 20½ German divisions. Between 21st March and 17th April the British front was attacked by 102, and the French front by 25 divisions.



blunder in the whole battle, the premature withdrawal from the Bray-Albert line on 26th March, was such a misunderstanding as may happen in any great struggle. As for Sir Hubert Gough, who suffered most in repute, there was no single flaw in his conduct of the retirement. On the contrary, it was due to him and his staff that Carey's Detachment held the gap, and his courage and cheerfulness never failed him. The fight of the Fifth Army against incredible odds will remain one of the most glorious episodes in the history of British arms, and its commander concluded his military career with its most brilliant chapter.

It is a futile business to apportion blame amid the infinite accidents of war ; but it is very certain that whatever discredit attached to the Somme retreat it did not fall upon the British soldier. The cause of the disaster was simply that a long front had been imposed upon Haig, and that he had not been given sufficient men wherewith to hold it. He had never ceased to plead for more levies from home, and to impress upon his Government the formidable character of the impending blow and the sector in which it would fall. The decision to extend to the Oise was not his, but that of the two Governments. The responsibility for the defeat must be laid upon the British War Cabinet, and principally upon the Prime Minister. Mr. Lloyd George saw with perfect clearness one part of the military problem of Britain, but he saw nothing steadily or whole. He realized the folly of a divided command, but his resolution was a committee instead of a man ; he saw the good prospects before Allenby in Palestine and the propagandist value of a victory there, but he did not realize that while battles were being won in the East the war might be lost for good in the West. There is much to be said in his justification. He had some reason for thinking that the British staffs were unimaginative and slow to revise their methods ; since, in common with these staffs, he did not foresee the new German battle plan, he might fairly argue that if a huge Allied superiority in the spring of 1917 could not break the German front, no more could Germany's extra 300,000 rifles now win a decision. But he was clearly in fault in leaving Haig so grossly weak when the troops could have been provided. Here again it is right to distinguish. Mr. Lloyd George could not get troops from Britain in large numbers without raising the age limit ; he dared not do that while leaving Ireland exempt, and he was naturally averse to putting his hand into the Irish bramble bush. It is true that when the disaster came he followed the first of these courses with the complete assent of the nation ; but it may be doubted

whether that assent would have been given so readily without the spectacle of the Somme retreat to compel it. But there were troops to be got elsewhere, troops kept in Britain as security against a mythical invasion, troops with Allenby and in Salonika; and the true charge against the Prime Minister is that when Haig's necessity was made plain, he did not discard the invasion whimsy, that he still flirted with Palestinian crusades, and did not do what he did later, and bring back every unit that could be spared from the Near East. Indirectly blessings flowed from the disaster. It gave us Foch, it hastened the coming of the American armies, it steeled a nation which had grown a little puzzled and apathetic. But in the five weeks from 21st March to the end of April our casualties amounted to over 300,000, or nearly double the losses in the thirty-four weeks of the Dardanelles campaign. The dead would not live again, and, though our recovery was miraculous, there was no need for so grievous a miracle. Had one half of the troops sent to France after the battle began been available for Haig before the 21st of March, the German thrust would have been parried at the start.

## CHAPTER XCIII

### THE BATTLE OF THE LYS

*April 7 – May 27, 1918*

The Lys Area — British and German Dispositions — Quast's Attack of 9th April — Armin's Attack of 10th April — The Struggle for the Messines Ridge — Haig's Appeal to his Troops — Fall of Bailleul — The Fight for Mont Kemmel — Close of Action — The Australians at Villers-Bretonneux — The Position of the Allies at the End of May.

LUDENDORFF, brought to a standstill on the Somme, prepared to put into effect the second part of his plan — to attack the depleted British front in Flanders, and roll up their line from the north. He was uneasy because of the exposed left flank of his new salient, the point of which was Montdidier; and he could not permit the battle to decline into a stalemate, and so lose the initiative. His main purpose was unchanged, but he sought to achieve it by a new method. He would attack the British elsewhere, in a terrain where they were notoriously weak, and compel Foch to use up his reserves in defending it; then, when these reserves had shrunk, he would strike again at the weakened door of Amiens. This new effort could not have the *élan* and fury of the first. He could not again key up his troops to that mood of assured victory in which they had named the 21st of March "Michael's Day" and looked for the enemy's destruction within a week. Eighteen days had now gone, and the Allied line still held. A second enterprise must be a fresh effort, without the aid of any momentum carried over from the first. But on Ludendorff's plan it was to be a strictly subsidiary operation, designed to prepare the way for his main task on the Somme. He proposed to allot only nine divisions for the initial stroke, and to choose a battle-ground where even a moderate force might obtain surprising results.



That battle-ground was the area just north of the La Bassée Canal, which Prince Rupprecht in the preceding December had proposed to make the scene of the main operation. The German Staff were aware that it had already been thinned to supply ten divisions for the fighting in the south, and it was at the moment weakly held, largely by troops exhausted in the Somme battle. Haig had drawn especially from it, because the section from La Bassée to the Scarpe seemed to be more vital to the enemy's purpose, and because in the north it would be possible to give ground and retire behind certain inundated areas without putting the whole front in such peril as would attend a retreat from Vimy. But that northern section had many attractions for German eyes. It was far enough from the Amiens battle to put a heavy strain upon the Allied power of reinforcement. The Germans had the great city of Lille as a screen for their assembly. Certain nodal points of communication, like Hazebrouck, lay at no great distance behind the British front. Again, any advance there threatened the Channel ports, and might be expected to work havoc with British nerves. The one difficulty was the marshy land crisscrossed by dykes and canals, but the dry spring had done much to harden its water-logged soil. For a short, sharp thrust, calculated to confuse the Allied plans and absorb the Allied reserves, the place was well chosen. Above all, the British communications were bad, and the German were all but perfect. From Ostend to Douai and Cambrai ran a great double lateral line, served by many feeders from the east, and from Lille there rayed out a network of auxiliary routes. Behind the British was only the railway from St. Pol by Béthune and Hazebrouck to Calais and Dunkirk, much of it only a single line, and some of it too near and most of it too remote from the front trenches.

Ludendorff prepared his attack on a limited scale. Though the original nine divisions must be reinforced later, there was no intention of being drawn into a major action. His aim was to push through between La Bassée and Armentières, capture Béthune, and form a defensive flank along the Aire-La Bassée Canal. Then he would direct his main pressure north-west, aiming at the capture of Hazebrouck and the ridge of hills north of Bailleul. This would utterly dislocate the whole British front towards the coast, and compel a general retirement west of Dunkirk and the floods of the river Aa. The British would be forced to fight hard to meet the peril, which directly menaced Calais and Boulogne; and when Foch had flung his last fresh troops into the breach, the time

would be ripe for the final thrust for Amiens and the sea. It was intended to be a battle for a sharply-defined, though ambitious, objective, and Ludendorff had assigned to it just as many divisions as he could spare without weakening his forces for the major operation to follow. These divisions were not shock troops in the same sense as those which had attacked on the 21st of March.

The battle-ground, where we had fought incessantly during the first two years of the campaign, had certain clearly-marked physical features. The river Lys, less than a hundred feet wide, and with muddy banks and bottom, flows between Merville and Armentières in a dead-flat plain. On the north bank are the Forest of Nieppe and the line of hills running east and west from north of Flêtre to Kemmel and Wytschaete — obstacles to an enemy advance, but, once captured, strategic points which would dominate the land to the north and west. South of the stream flat and boggy meadows stretch for ten miles to the La Bassée Canal, with, on the east, the Aubers ridge which shelters Lille. Clearly, Béthune, a junction on the British lateral railway, must be captured as the first objective, for till that was done the left flank would not be secure for the drive north-westward across the Lys to Merville and Hazebrouck.

The German army opposite this area was the VI., under Quast. Its right extended to the Lys, whence the IV. Army continued to the sea. The latter was under Sixt von Armin, who had resisted so stoutly at Passchendaele the autumn before, and he had as his chief of staff General von Lossberg, one of the ablest of German tacticians. Both armies were part of the group of the Crown Prince Rupprecht of Bavaria. The immediate reserves were not large, but they could be speedily supplemented from Ludendorff's mass of manœuvre in the back areas. The British front from the sea to Arras was held by the Second Army, under Sir Herbert Plumer, and the First Army, under Sir Henry Horne — the boundary between the two being the stream of the Lys. It will be remembered that as a result of the Third Battle of Ypres our line lay east of the Passchendaele heights, just west of Gheluvelt, and thence to the Lys, a mile or two west of Warneton, covering the Wytschaete-Messines ridge. It crossed the Lys two miles east of Armentières, and then fell back sharply to the west, just covering Neuve Chapelle and Festubert, till it reached the La Bassée Canal east of the slight rise at Givenchy. The front north of the Lys was strongly placed, though the Passchendaele salient might prove a source of weakness; but on the south of the stream it had no

natural defences save the dykes and runlets, though the ruins of the many farms and cottages gave it numerous strong points. The 2nd Corps, under Sir C. W. Jacob, held the Passchendaele area, with, on its right, the 22nd Corps, under Sir A. J. Godley. Just north of the Lys, covering the Wyttschaete ridge, was the 9th Corps, under Sir A. Hamilton Gordon. On the left of the First Army were the 15th \* Corps, under Sir J. P. Du Cane, and the 11th Corps, under Sir R. C. Haking. Beyond the La Bassée Canal lay the 1st Corps, under Sir Arthur Holland. The three corps directly threatened between Messines and La Bassée had seven divisions in line — from left to right, the 9th, 19th, 25th, 34th, 40th, 2nd Portuguese, and 55th.

The British front in this area on 7th April was in the unstable condition which attends readjustment. The two Portuguese divisions had been during the whole winter in a bad section, and needed rest, and it had been arranged that their relief should be completed by the morning of 10th April. But on the 7th only one of the Portuguese divisions had been withdrawn. Of the seven British divisions, all but the 55th had been gravely weakened in the retreat from St. Quentin, and the 9th especially had gone through some of the severest fighting of the battle. In support there were the 51st and 50th Divisions, but both of these had suffered the same ordeal, and were very tired. It should be remembered that, out of the fifty-eight divisions which represented Haig's total strength, forty-six had already been engaged in the southern battle. The Commander-in-Chief, who was aware that the enemy contemplated a stroke north of La Bassée, was also aware of its purpose. He knew that the enemy's main force was still concentrated east of Amiens, and he did not dare further to weaken that front. Moreover, Foch — the enemy attack having been checked on the Somme — was already planning a counterstroke. He proposed to take Micheler's Fifth Army out of the line in Champagne, and get Maistre's Tenth Army back from Italy, and he hoped to strike at once south of the river with the British on the left. Haig had no alternative but to wait till the enemy revealed himself, and to expect an attack in the north on a line held by depleted divisions.

Sunday, the 7th April, was a mild spring day, with a thick fog in the morning hours. It passed quietly, but late in the evening an intense bombardment with gas shells began along the front

\* On the second day of the battle the 15th Corps was transferred to the Second Army.



between Lens and Armentières. The latter town had been consistently shelled by the Germans since the beginning of the year, and was no longer used by our troops. The gas bombardment continued during the 8th, and at 4 a.m. on the morning of Tuesday, the 9th, a furious preparation commenced, in which gas was mingled with high explosives. At about 7 a.m. the full weight of the German infantry assault fell upon the 15th and 11th Corps. The first to break was the 2nd Portuguese Division, which, stale from long inaction and indifferently led, was driven in at the first thrust. The flank of the 40th Division was turned, and the enemy streamed through the gap. The left of the 55th (West Lancashire) Division was also turned, and the confusion of the fog and the gas made it hard for those behind to know what was happening; but the 51st and 50th Divisions were at once moved up behind Richebourg St. Vaast and Laventie, and cavalry and cyclists were sent forward to cover their deployment. By 10.15 a.m. the enemy was more than a mile in rear of the right battalion of the 40th Division, and that division was gradually forced back to a line facing south from Bois Grenier by Fleurbaix to the Lys at Sailly. The whole centre had gone, though gallant machine-gun posts continued to resist long after the Germans had swept past them. The 55th Division had swung back in the same way, and formed a defensive flank facing north between Festubert and Le Touret. From Le Touret to the Lys was the gap which the 50th and 51st Divisions were labouring to stop; but the enemy progress had been so swift that we were forced out of all our prepared defences before we had the time to man them.

The events of that mad day were so tangled that it is hard to present them in a clear narrative. Let us take the centre first. The 1st King Edward's Horse and the 11th Cyclist Battalion managed to hold on for a time in Lacouture and Vieille Chapelle, and so enabled the 50th and 51st Divisions to take up position from Le Touret to Estaires along the east bank of the Lawe River. During the afternoon they were slowly forced towards the river crossings, and in the evening the Germans passed both streams at Estaires and Pont Riqueul, but were driven back again. When dark fell we still held the bridgeheads as far east as Sailly. In the north of the new salient the 40th Division had had a feverish day. Before noon the enemy reached the Lys below Estaires, and intervened between it and the 50th Division. This compelled the right of the 40th early in the afternoon to withdraw across the river at Bac St. Maur. Its centre and left, assisted by troops of the

34th Division, continued to hold a very bad line from the Lys to our old front north of Bois Grenier; and the 12th Suffolks, though hopelessly outflanked, defended Fleurbaix till the evening. Meantime the Germans followed hard on our heels at Bac St. Maur. They crossed the river there about three o'clock in the afternoon, and pushed north as far as Croix du Bac. There the reserve brigade of the 25th Division held them for the moment, but could not prevent them from establishing a strong position north of the river.

Quast's advance had been cyclonic; but something was still wanting to complete his success. Unless he captured Béthune forthwith he would be cramped into too narrow a gate. But the 55th Division \* did not yield, though outnumbered by four to one. It had retired its left flank, but it still covered Béthune, and its right at Givenchy stood like a rock. By noon the enemy had rushed the ruins; in the afternoon the Lancashire men had recovered them; in the evening they were again lost, and again in the night retaken. This splendid defence was the determining event of the first stage of the battle. It was due, said the official dispatch, "in great measure to the courage and determination displayed by our advanced posts. These held out with the utmost resolution though surrounded, pinning to the ground those parties of the enemy who had penetrated our defences, and preventing them from developing their attack. Among the many gallant deeds recorded of them, one instance is known of a machine gun which was kept in action although the German infantry had entered the rear compartment of the 'pill-box' from which it was firing, the gun team holding up the enemy by revolver fire from the inner compartment."

All night there was intermittent fighting at the crossings of the Lawe and the Lys. Early on the morning of Wednesday, 10th April, after a heavy bombardment, the enemy attacked at Lestrem and Estaires. He won the farther bank at both places, but was driven back by counter-attacks. All day the 50th Division was in action, and the streets of Estaires saw bitter machine-gun fighting. In the evening the town was lost, and the 50th Division retired to a position which had been hastily prepared to the north and west. East of Estaires the enemy enlarged the bridgehead he had won the night before, and forced the left of the 40th Division beyond

\* This was the division which had been driven in between Banteux and Vendhuile by the German counter-attack at Cambrai. Its performance now was its answer to its critics.

Steenwerck — an advance of nearly four miles. He was broadening his salient by striking northward.

Meantime a second German army had entered the battle. At 5.30 a.m. Armin's infantry attacked north of the Lys from Frelinghien as far as Hill 60. The outposts of the 25th and 19th Divisions were driven in, and during the morning, under cover of the fog, the enemy filtered into our battle positions from Ploegsteert Wood to Messines, along the valleys of the Warnave and Douve streams. By noon he had taken Ploegsteert village and the south-east part of the wood, and had captured most of Messines, while farther north he had driven in our line as far as Hollebeke and was close on the crest of the Wytschaete ridge. In the afternoon, however, the 9th Division brought him to a standstill, and its South African Brigade \* retook the crest of the Wytschaete ridge. This stand saved our northern wing, and gave us time to adjust our front to meet the grave situation at Ploegsteert. Armentières was outflanked and clearly untenable, and during the afternoon the 34th Division, which held the place, retired to the left bank of the Lys, after destroying the bridges. The situation on the Wednesday evening was, therefore, as follows. The German line ran from Hollebeke, by Wytschaete and Messines, through the south-east corner of Ploegsteert Wood, west of Ploegsteert village, south of Nieppe, north of Steenwerck, north and west of Estaires, east of Lestrem, east of the Lawe River, Le Touret, and Givenchy. It was a narrow front for a great advance, for the British pillars at Givenchy and the Messines ridge were still standing.

On Thursday, the 11th, Quast and Armin, with fresh reserves, attacked on the whole front. The 55th Division was unshaken, but in the centre the line of the Lawe stream was lost. The night before the enemy had won a footing on the western bank half-way between Locon and Lestrem, and during the day he was able to enlarge his holding and push out westward. This made impossible the position of the 50th Division north and west of Estaires, and during the afternoon it was driven back towards Merville. The German masses, pressing on in close formation, had bulged out our front, and so lengthened the line to be held by the 50th. Gaps opened up through which the enemy pushed, and by 6 p.m. he was at Neuf Berquin, on the Estaires-Hazebrouck road, and, moving along the Lys, had entered Merville. Our front there was drawn

\* After Marrières Wood this brigade had been reconstituted from reserves. It was a second time destroyed at the Battle of the Lys, and shrunk to a battalion, but it became a brigade again in August.



back to the little stream of the Bourre just west of the town. Farther east the 40th Division was forced well north of Steenwerck ; but the 31st Division had arrived from the Somme, and, counter-attacking towards evening, recovered the villages of Le Verrier and La Becque. On their left the 34th Division was in serious danger. It was heavily attacked, and though it succeeded in holding Nieppe during the day, the pressure on the 25th Division from Ploegsteert left it in an untenable salient. That afternoon Messines was finally lost, but the 9th Division was still standing south of Hollebeke and on the Wytschaete ridge. Plumer decided to rearrange his front, and early in the night he relinquished Nieppe, retiring to the neighbourhood of Pont d'Achelles. This involved the retirement of the 25th and 19th Divisions to a front about 1,000 yards east of Neuve Eglise and Wulverghem, and the abandonment of Hill 63. That night our front ran from Givenchy to Locon, west of Merville, west of Neuf Berquin, north of Steenwerck and Nieppe, east of Neuve Eglise and Wulverghem, west of Messines, and along the ridge just covering Wytschaete. The pillars still held.

Up to now the enemy had not used more than sixteen divisions. But on the morning of Friday, the 12th, he began to throw in his reserves at a furious pace. Elated by his success, he turned what was meant as a secondary into a major operation, and dreamed of Boulogne and Calais. It was Ludendorff's second blunder, and it was fatal. The original plan had been conceived as a series of blows in different terrains, leading up to a final effort. His first mistake was made when, misled by Hutier's success, he tried to break through in a single action and take Amiens. Now came his second, when the lure of the Channel ports constrained him. He used his mass of manœuvre in an area where he had to begin *de novo*, and where he could not directly aid the great central thrust on the Somme. He lost the advantage of the cumulative blow, and abandoned the assets which he had won. If it succeeded, it would be a new plan, different from the first ; if it failed, the first could only be resumed with impaired resources. Blindness seemed to have fallen for the moment on the German High Command — a blindness born of a too confident pride. It all but destroyed the British Army ; but it saved the Allied front, and in the long run gave them the victory.

On Friday morning British reinforcements were arriving — the 3rd, 4th, 5th, 31st, 61st, and 1st Australian Divisions ; but they could only come gradually into line, and we had still to face most critical days. Just before dawn the enemy broke through

the left centre of the 51st Division near Pacaut, due south of Merville, and less than two miles from the La Bassée Canal. But for the brilliant work of our batteries, the Germans might have crossed the canal; and, as it was, they won a position on its eastern bank. The 3rd Division had now come up on the right of the 51st and the 61st Division on its left, and though both had been fighting for weeks south of Arras, they were able to steady the front between Locon and the Clarence river. At Merville itself, too, we held our ground; but the weight of the fresh German troops was felt in the pressure north of the Lys. At 8 a.m. Quast attacked on the front between the Estaires-Hazebrouck road and Steenwerck, and, in spite of gallant work by the 29th Division, which had come up in support, drove in our line at Doulieu and La Becque, and created an ugly gap south-west of Bailleul. This let through bodies of the enemy, who seized Merris and Outtersteene, north of the railway. The Germans were pushing direct for Hazebrouck, and were now close on Bailleul station. It was a grave moment; but in the evening any further advance was checked by a brigade of the 33rd Division, which, with a miscellaneous assortment of other troops, filled the breach. On the left of the British front there was no change during the day. The 49th Division had come up on the right of the 34th, and these divisions and the 25th maintained the line south and south-east of Bailleul. The 19th and the 9th were still holding east of Wulverghem and Wytschaete. The result of the day had been that the enemy had curved out his front towards the north in a crescent, the maximum depth of which was about two miles.

Saturday, 13th April, saw a resolute continuance of the German attacks. These were aimed at the weakly-held gap in front of Bailleul, the first step towards Hazebrouck, and at the British positions at Neuve Eglise and Wulverghem, which were the key of Mont Kemmel. In the first area the 29th and 31st Divisions, both seriously depleted, held a front of 10,000 yards. Behind them the 1st Australian Division was detrainning, and it was imperative that the front should hold till it could appear in line. On the west of the gap the 4th Guards Brigade had arrived and taken over a front of 4,000 yards. Here the Germans launched their main assault, and in the foggy morning they were able to bring field guns up to point-blank range. At first things went badly, and the village of Vieux Berquin fell. In the afternoon our line gave in parts, though outflanked garrisons continued to hold out to the end. For a moment it seemed as if the enemy

had a clear path before him; but the resistance of the wearied troops had given the Australians time to organize positions east of the great Forest of Nieppe. By the evening they had taken over the section, and the gate of Hazebrouck was shut. The British endurance throughout this desperate day had been beyond praise. "No more brilliant exploit," wrote the Commander-in-Chief, "has taken place since the opening of the enemy's offensive, though gallant actions have been without number."

Meantime, in the second area the struggle was scarcely less bitter. Early on the Saturday morning the enemy forced his way into Neuve Eglise, but in the afternoon he was driven out by troops of the 33rd and 49th Divisions, while the 34th and the rest of the 33rd were engaged between Meteren and La Crèche. In the evening the Germans won their way between La Crèche and Neuve Eglise, and so outflanked the left of the 34th Division. We could not continue on such a line, so during the night the 34th withdrew to the high ground called the Ravelsberg, between Bailleul and Neuve Eglise, without hindrance from the enemy. That night the Germans were again in Neuve Eglise, and after much confused fighting it passed finally into their hands on the following day.

The end of the week saw a slight stabilizing of the British front. The Germans had exhausted their first impetus, and, as had happened a fortnight before on the Somme, were pausing for breath. But the situation was still full of anxiety. The enemy had driven a great bulge into our line, which threatened two vital centres of our communications — Béthune, on the south, and Hazebrouck, on the north-west. He was on the edge, too, of the line of upland from Mont des Cats to Kemmel, which commanded all the northern plain toward the Channel. No French troops had yet appeared, for Foch showed himself as difficult to persuade of the gravity of the attack as Pétain had been on 21st March. He declined to take over any part of the British line, and would only agree to keep four French divisions in readiness if required. Then he dispatched the 2nd Cavalry Corps under General Robillet, but it was not till the 15th that two infantry divisions under Mitry began to arrive in the Lys area. All available British reserves were hurried up, but with all our efforts we could not be otherwise than outnumbered, and, since the fight had become a major operation, we had to face continued drafts from the great German reserve. On the 11th Haig issued an order of the day in which he appealed to his men to endure to the last. "There is no other course open



to us but to fight it out. Every position must be held to the last man; there must be no retirement. With our backs to the wall, and believing in the justice of our cause, each one of us must fight on to the end. The safety of our homes and the freedom of mankind depend alike upon the conduct of each one of us at this critical moment." The British Commander-in-Chief was not addicted to rhetorical speech, and these grave words from one so silent had a profound effect upon the army and the nation. No less solemn was Lieutenant-General Sir Arthur Currie's charge to his troops before they entered the battle.

"Looking back with pride on the unbroken record of your glorious achievements, asking you to realize that to-day the fate of the British Empire hangs in the balance, I place my trust in the Canadian Corps, knowing that where Canadians are engaged there can be no giving way. Under the orders of your devoted officers in the coming battle you will advance or fall where you stand facing the enemy.

"To those who fall I say, 'You will not die, but will step into immortality. Your mothers will not lament your fate, but will be proud to have borne such sons. Your names will be revered for ever and ever by your grateful country, and God will take you unto Himself.' "

On Sunday, the 14th, the struggle continued at Neuve Eglise, which fell; at Bailleul and Merville, where our line was maintained; and east of Robecq, where we improved our position and took prisoners. Next morning the 19th Division repelled an attack at Wytschaete, and late in the afternoon the battle flared up south of Bailleul. Three fresh German divisions, including part of the Bavarian Alpine Corps, attacked our front on the Ravelsberg, and after heavy fighting seized the east end of the ridge and worked their way westward. At seven in the evening they had the whole height, and Bailleul was doomed. We fell back to a line between Méteren and Dranoutre, and at 9 p.m. the Germans entered the town. Meantime, in order to delay any attack which the enemy might make in the north, we had begun to evacuate the Ypres salient. By the morning of the 13th the Passchendaele ridge was held only by outposts, and by the morning of the 16th the 2nd Corps had withdrawn approximately to the old position a mile east of the town from which the Third Battle of Ypres had started. Our front now ran along the Steenbeek stream, and by the Westhoek ridge to Wytschaete. This gave us a strong position, and enabled us to economize men. The retreat was not disturbed; but on the morning of

Tuesday, the 16th, our front at Wytschaete and Spanbroekmolen was attacked, with the result that the enemy captured both places, and forced us back to a line south of Lindenhoek. That day, too, he secured a footing in Méteren. The first French troops had now arrived, and by a counter-attack that evening they regained Méteren, while the 9th Division temporarily reoccupied part of Wytschaete. But it was not for long, and by the morning of the 17th the enemy held both villages. This meant that the northern pillar of our defence had gone, for we were now everywhere off the ridge, and the time had come for Armin to advance on Mont Kemmel.

We may pause to consider the nature of the phase into which the battle had now developed. The enemy had definitely set himself to secure a decision in this area, and his immediate aim was, by the capture of Béthune, Hazebrouck, and the Kemmel range, to drive Haig back to a front pivoting upon Arras, and running to the sea by St. Omer and the line of the river Aa. Such a front would have been strong so far as natural defences went, but it would have produced certain unpleasant consequences for the British Command. Dunkirk would be in the enemy's hands, and he would be many miles nearer the Narrows of the Channel. He would be only some ten miles distant from Calais, and could render that port useless with his big guns. The British would have no good lateral communications except those passing along the coast. A new and awkward salient would be created at Arras, and the Vimy ridge would probably become untenable. Finally, the British would be desperately circumscribed in the area left them to manœuvre in, and any fresh German advance would mean the loss of the Channel ports.

To effect this design, Ludendorff had to secure certain immediate objectives. The first was Béthune; the second was the Kemmel range, which would give him Hazebrouck, for the direct advance on that town by way of Merville presented difficulties. There was a third objective, which, if attained, would give him all he desired. This was an advance north of the Ypres salient, which would turn the Kemmel range and drive the 2nd Corps and the Belgians in confusion through narrow necks of retreat with a great loss in men and guns. Five more divisions had arrived from Russia, giving the Germans a total of 204 in the West, as against 166 of the Allies. It was true that 128 had been engaged in heavy fighting since 21st March, and that of these sixty had been employed twice and ten thrice; but Ludendorff had still twenty-two

fresh divisions in reserve, and many of those which he had withdrawn under his system of *roulement* were now sufficiently rested to return to the line. It was all in flat defiance of his old plan, and was fatally mortgaging the resources for his future strategy; but that was small comfort to the British army, now worn to a shadow by a month's struggle against preposterous odds.

The next two days were in some ways the most critical of the whole battle. The enemy had reached his greatest strength, and the British troops were not yet reinforced at any point within sight of security. On the morning of Wednesday, the 17th, Armin launched his attack north of the Ypres salient against the Belgians astride the Ypres-Staden railway. On a front of 4,000 yards he used twenty-one battalions, drawn principally from the 58th Saxon, the 6th Bavarian, and the 2nd Naval Divisions — all troops of proved quality. It began at 8.30 a.m. without any preliminary bombardment, and at the first shock the Belgian line was pierced at one point, and bodies of the enemy pressed through towards Bixschoote. But the Belgian reinforcements struck in upon the right flank of the advance, drove it into marshy ground, and completely defeated it. Over 700 prisoners were taken, and some 2,000 Germans were killed — an exploit greatly to the credit of troops who had lived for long in a stagnant and difficult section, and, so far, the most successful counterstroke in the Lys battle. The same morning Armin's left assaulted the wooded slopes of Kemmel, for the possession of the Wytschaete ridge now gave him observation over all the country to the west. At the same time strong subsidiary attacks were made in the Méteren and Merris area. After an intense bombardment the German infantry advanced with great resolution from their new positions at Neuve Eglise and Wulverghem. They were repulsed at all points with heavy losses by the 34th, 49th, and 19th Divisions. At Méteren and Merris they fared no better, for the 33rd and 1st Australian Divisions stood firm on that front. The first two of the German plans had been foiled.

But next day, Thursday, the 18th, came a more serious threat this time on the southern flank of the salient towards Béthune. After a long bombardment, Quast attacked on almost the whole front between Merville and Givenchy. The enemy in previous fighting had gained the eastern bank of the La Bassée Canal, at the point where it is crossed by the road from Hinges to Merville, and on the night of the 17th he took the village of Riez du Vinage. Between that point and Givenchy he had six divisions of assault, and at the Hinges bridge he was massed to the extent of nine or



ten bayonets to the yard. His first attempt, made just at dawn, was to reach the canal bank on a broad front; but his troops were mown down by the fire of our batteries on the other side, directed by observation from the little mound of Bernenchon. In his second attempt he came down the Merville road, reached the canal, and launched his pontoons. But he never crossed. The fire of the 4th Division broke up his troops into something like a rout, and before the daylight had fully come the enterprise had failed utterly, with immense slaughter. It was for the Germans the most futile and costly incident of the battle.

At Robecq there was an attack by one division, easily repulsed by the 61st, and at Givenchy an attempt by no less than three. The latter was for the time a critical affair, and some of our advance posts changed hands many times during the day. The pillar, however, stood firm, and by the evening the 1st Division had recovered every yard of ground that had been lost. This action was the end of the first and principal phase of the battle, and so severely had the Germans suffered in the past two days that for nearly a week quiet reigned on our front. We were able to improve our position by local counter-attacks at Festubert and between the Lawe and Clarence rivers, and to relieve some of the divisions which had suffered most. The French had already come into line about Méteren and Spanbroekmolen, and by the morning of Sunday, the 21st, had taken over the whole section between these points, which was the front of assault against Mont Kemmel.\*

There were signs about this time that Ludendorff's mind was growing anxious about his main offensive on the Somme. The attack on Villers Bretonneux, which we shall presently consider, was clearly meant as a preparation for the final movement on Amiens. The Allies had added to their total strength by bringing troops from Britain, from Italy, and from Egypt; but these did little more than replace the month's heavy wastage. Nine British divisions had been reduced to *cadres*, and the number of fighting divisions left was only fifty-one. Foch had already used up part of his mass of manœuvre, and the Germans had at the moment a

\* Since 21st March the British Army had engaged alone 79 German divisions, the French alone 24, and 23 divisions had been engaged by both French and British. Of the British 79, 28 had been fought twice and 1 thrice; of the French 24, 4 had been fought twice; of the joint 23, 15 had been engaged twice and 1 thrice. The British had therefore had 109 fights with German divisions alone, and the French 28 alone. Taking all the engagements together, the British had had 149, and the French 68 fights with German divisions.

numerical superiority of considerably over a quarter of a million men. It was beyond doubt the part of wisdom for Ludendorff to break off the battle on the Lys and use his still formidable reserve to secure a decision in the main area. But it is a characteristic of strategical blunders that they compel their authors to pursue them to their last consequences, and make it impossible for them to retrace their steps. Ludendorff had dipped too deeply in the north to withdraw easily. He had incurred huge losses without gaining any real strategical objective, and he could not bring himself to write off these losses without another effort to pluck the fruit which was so near his grasp. Accordingly he continued the northern fight, and struck again for Mont Kemmel — the isolated eastern outlier of the range behind Bailleul. If the Germans secured it they would broaden their comfortless salient and win direct observation over the northern plain. They would make our front at Ypres, if not untenable, at least insecure, and they would prepare the way for an advance westward along the ridge to Hazebrouck. An attack there at the moment had one special attraction for them, for adjacent to Kemmel was the junction of the British and French lines, which they regarded as the weakest spot in the front. The French lay from the Messines-Kemmel road, half-way between Kemmel and Wytschaete, to the neighbourhood of St. Jans Cappelle, with, on their left, the British 9th Division, and on their right the 1st Australian. From left to right their troops were the 28th, 154th, 34th, and 133rd Divisions.

On the morning of Thursday, 25th April, seventeen days since the battle began, the enemy violently bombarded the whole front from Méteren to the Ypres-Comines Canal. At 5 a.m. he attacked with nine divisions, five of which were fresh. His aim was to capture Kemmel by a direct assault on the French, and by a simultaneous attack upon the British south of Wytschaete to turn their flank and separate the two forces. At first he succeeded. At ten in the morning he had worked his way round the lower slopes, driven in the French 28th Division, and taken Kemmel village and the hill itself, though isolated French troops still held out in both places. In the British area the 9th and 49th Divisions were heavily engaged west of Wytschaete. Before midday the right of the 9th was driven back to Vierstraat, but we still retained the Grand Bois on the slopes north of Wytschaete village. In the afternoon the 21st Division, farther north, was also attacked, and by the evening the whole line in this area had been forced back to positions running from Hill 60 by Voormezele and north of

Vierstraat to the hamlet of La Clytte, on the Poperinghe-Kemmel road, where we linked up with the French.

By next morning supports had arrived, and an attempt was made to recapture the lost ground. The 25th Division, along with elements of the 21st and 49th Divisions, re-entered Kemmel village, but found themselves unable to maintain it against flanking fire from the northern slopes of the hill, since the French had been unable to advance. Then followed the second wave of the German assault. It failed to make ground owing to the gallant resistance of the 49th Division, and of the 21st, 30th, 39th, and 9th Divisions, all four of which had been fighting for five weeks without rest. That afternoon the French recaptured Locre, on the saddle between Kemmel Hill and the heights to the west. Our line in that quarter now ran just below the eastern slopes of the Scherpenberg, east of Locre, and thence south of St. Jans Cappelle to Méteren. The loss of Kemmel and the threat to Voormezele made it necessary to adjust our front in the Ypres salient. Accordingly that night we withdrew to a line running from Pilkem to Voormezele by way of Wieltje and the west end of the Zillebeke lake.

In the afternoon of the 27th the Germans captured Voormezele, but were driven out by a counter-attack early in the night. On the 28th the French were heavily in action around Locre, but there was no material change in the situation. On the morning of Monday, 29th April, after an intense bombardment, the enemy attacked the French and British positions from west of Dranoutre to Voormezele. The Allied front at the moment ran around the eastern base of Mont Rouge, just covering Locre, across the low saddle of the range to the meadows in front of La Clytte, and thence by Voormezele to the Ypres-Comines Canal. The British right was in the neighbourhood of the cross-roads which we called Hyde Park Corner, on the saddle between the Scherpenberg and Mont Rouge. There lay the 25th Division as far as the little stream which runs from Kemmel to the Dickebusch lake. On its left was the 49th Division as far as Voormezele, and beyond it the 21st Division to the canal. The enemy made three main assaults—first against the French, to carry Locre and Mont Rouge; the second at the junction of the French and the 25th Division, aimed at turning the Scherpenberg; and the third between the 49th and 21st Divisions, to turn the obstacle called Ridge Wood.

The infantry attack was launched at 5 a.m. in a dense mist by at least eleven divisions—six against the French, and five against the British. It was delivered in mass formation, the density being



from six to eight bayonets to the yard. At first by its sheer weight it succeeded. The Germans entered Locre, and even reached Hyde Park Corner, which all but gave them their objective. Then came the French counterstroke, which completely checked them, and drove them back at points nearly a mile beyond the line from which they had started. On the British front no ground was gained at all. The three divisions in line, with the assistance of troops of the 30th and 39th Divisions, not only stood firm, but in some cases advanced to meet the oncoming Germans and drove them back with the bayonet. A second attack at 6 a.m. was equally disastrous. At the end of the day Locre remained in German hands, but it was retaken by the French the following morning. Farther north the Belgians had been attacked on the Ypres-Staden railway, but had repulsed the enemy with the same vigour that they had shown on the 17th. The result of this action was a complete and most costly German repulse. The enemy attacked with some 80,000 men, and his casualties were at least a quarter of his strength.

The fight of 29th April was the last episode in the Battle of the Lys. Thereafter there were only local actions. On 1st May the French made a slight advance north-east of Locre. On the night of 3rd May the British improved their position north-east of Hinges. On the 4th the enemy opened an intense bombardment between Méteren and Ypres, which, as we learned later, was intended as a preparation for a serious attack. But the weather interfered, and still more our counter-bombardment. On the 8th an attack between Voormezele and La Clytte was easily repulsed. On the night of 10th May, and on the 11th, the French gained ground in the Kemmel area, and on the night of the 12th we made a successful gas attack on the Lens-La Bassée front. On the 19th we straightened out a slight salient north-west of Merville. On the 27th the French between Locre and Voormezele were attacked by four divisions, but the little ground they lost was recovered on the following morning. By that day the centre of gravity had moved from the Lys and the Somme to the Aisne.

It remains to record the events of these weeks in the Amiens area. During the Battle of the Lys the British had had to face there only local attacks directed mainly at Hangard, where the Fourth Army linked up with the French. On the morning of 24th April, however, the enemy attacked the Fourth Army with four divisions on the line between the Somme and the Ancre. His

N O R T H S E A

# THE BATTLE OF THE LYS.

(Facing p. 236.)





THE BATTLE OF THE LYS  
JUNE 4, 1940





bombardment began at 3.30 a.m., and at 6.30, under cover of fog, the new German tanks broke through our line south-east of Villers-Bretonneux. His aim was to secure the high ground between the Somme and the Luce as a base for a movement against Amiens. For the first and only time he found his tanks of value, and it was by their aid that he opened the way to the village. Villers-Bretonneux fell, but the advance was checked at the wood to the west by a counter-attack of the 8th Division. South of the village our heavy tanks destroyed or dispersed the enemy's tanks advancing on Cachy.

At 10 p.m. that night came the British counter-attack, conducted by a mixed brigade of the 18th and 58th Divisions and two brigades of the 4th and 5th Australians. That the counter-stroke should have been so prompt showed the resource and vigilance of the British Command. The Australians cut their way through thick belts of wire, and advanced with complete certainty over country which had not been previously reconnoitred. At daybreak on the 25th Villers-Bretonneux was all but surrounded, and during the morning troops of the 8th Division fought their way through its streets. That afternoon it was wholly in our hands, together with 1,000 prisoners. One episode deserves to be specially remembered. Seven of our "whippet" tanks, debouching from north of Cachy, attacked the enemy on the ridge between Villers-Bretonneux and Hangard wood. The ridge was held by machine-gun groups in shell-holes, while on the eastern slopes three German battalions were forming up in the open for attack. The "whippets" moved from shell-hole to shell-hole, annihilating the machine-gun groups, and then proceeded to disperse the infantry. One was destroyed by shell fire; the others returned with a total casualty list of five. It was a wonderful performance, for the "whippets" left their base, three and a half miles from the seat of action, after 11 a.m., and were home before 3 p.m., having fought over a distance of ten miles. Twenty men with five casualties to themselves had inflicted losses of 400 on the enemy, and completely broken up a German brigade. It was a triumphant proof of the value of the light tank in a counter-offensive.

This brilliant affair seemed to damp the enemy's ardour on the Somme. During May there was little to record. On the night of the 5th, and again on the night of the 7th, we advanced our line south-west of Morlancourt, between the Somme and the Ancre. On the 14th the enemy attacked the new front without success. Meantime, the French on the 9th had captured the park at Grivesnes,

north-west of Montdidier, and on the 11th had repulsed an attack south-west of Mailly-Raineval. On the 14th they advanced south of Hailles, and secured a wood on the west bank of the Avre. On the 19th the 2nd Australians took Ville-sur-Ancre, and improved their front in the angle of the two rivers. The German quiescence in May was more marked on the Amiens front than even in the north.

The Battle of the Lys was for the enemy a tactical success but a strategic failure. He achieved no one of his principal aims, and in the struggle he weakened his chances of a future offensive by squandering some of his best reserves. By the end of April he had employed in that one northern area thirty-five fresh divisions and nine which had been already in action. These troops were the cream of his army, and could not be replaced. Moreover, an odd feature had appeared in the last stages of the Lys battle. The Germans seemed to have forgotten their tactics of infiltration, and to have fallen back upon their old methods of mass and shock. For the weakness of the new tactics was becoming clear. They could be used only with specially trained troops and with fresh troops; they put too great a strain upon wearied divisions and raw levies; therefore, as the enemy's losses grew, his tactics would deteriorate in the same proportion. There were other signs of stress. The 1919 class had been long ago absorbed in the line, and there was evidence that the 1920 class, the last resource of Germany's manhood, was beginning to appear in the field dépôts.

Nevertheless, at the close of May the immediate strength of the Allies was still far inferior to that of the Germans. They had on their whole front 168 divisions, and the enemy had 208. He had a reserve of at least eighty divisions which he could use for a new blow. The Americans were arriving; but it would be two months yet before, by normal calculations, they could make any notable difference in the battle. Foch had expended much of his reserve, and the British army, actively engaged for nine weeks, was very tired. A new blow was impending, but the exact terrain was hard to guess. There were signs of a revival of the battle on the Lys. There was the continuing threat to Amiens. Much pontoon and bridging material had been brought to Flanders from Russia, and it looked as if another attempt might be made to turn the Allied flank on the Yser. From Italy, too, came news that the omens pointed to a great Austrian attack astride the Brenta, and it was reasonable to assume that Germany might assist in the operations.

Lastly, there was the dangerous southern flank of the main Western salient, where an assault had been anticipated before 21st March.

Foch had no easy problem before him. With heroic parsimony he must nurse his scanty reserves, and at the same time be prepared to face at any moment a new assault in any one of four sections of his long front. The darkest clouds of March and April had dispersed ; but the air was still heavy with doubt, and the issues of the battle were still uncertain. It is such a season that tries the nerves of a general far more highly than a fight against odds. After his fashion he was devising an offensive — by the French to disengage the Amiens-Paris railway ; by the British to clear the Béthune and Ypres areas. But he was also ready to meet a fresh German assault, which he believed might come between Arras and Montdidier. The May days passed in a tense expectancy, and then, in the last week of the month, the doubt was resolved. For very early on the morning of the 27th the storm broke on the Chemin des Dames ; by the evening the French gains in three great actions had vanished like smoke, and the enemy was across the Aisne. On the second day he was beyond the Vesle, and on the third his vanguard was looking down from the heights of the Tardenois on the waters of the Marne.



## CHAPTER XCIV

### THE WAR AT SEA: ZEEBRUGGE AND OSTEND

*October 17, 1917—May 10, 1918*

The Control of the Submarine Peril—America's Naval Co-operation—Last Fight of the *Goeben* and the *Breslau*—Sir Roger Keyes's Plan—The Attack on Zeebrugge—The Attack on Ostend—Paralysis of German Fleet.

THE spring of 1917 had been the most critical period of the war, graver even than that stage we have just chronicled when the enemy stood at the gate of Amiens, for in April 1917 Germany seemed to have devised a weapon which the Allies could not parry and which struck straight at their heart. Their shipping was fast disappearing from the seas, and with it the sustenance of the British people and the munitionment of all the Allied armies. In that month there was food enough in Britain to last the civilian population six weeks and no more. Could Germany have realized earlier that marvellous chance, and have been in the position to keep more U-boats constantly at work on the great shipping routes, she would have sunk in a single month not 850,000 tons, but 2,000,000 tons, and would have had the victory before the close of the year.

By the spring of 1918 the submarine menace was conclusively broken — broken at sea, without regard to the fortunes of the enemy by land. Partly it was done by weapons of offence — the destroyer, the decoy ship, the airplane, the bomb, and the depth-charge. All these we have already seen at work, but by now two other foes of the U-boat had declared themselves. One was the Allied submarine; there were only some hundred of them, but they sank twenty U-boats, and had therefore the best average.\* The other

\* The 500 Allied destroyers sank 34 U-boats; the Allied auxiliary patrol craft, about 3,000 in number, sank 31.

was the American sub-chaser — little wooden vessels, displacing only 60 tons and manned by young men fresh from college. These tiny craft crossed the Atlantic under their own power in the face of fierce winter gales, and in the English and Irish Channels and at the mouth of the Adriatic by means of their listening devices located and hunted many U-boats to their doom. Partly the defeat was due to Allied methods of defence — the dazzle ship, the barrage, and the convoy. In November 1917 the American navy set to work to lay a barrage of mines across the 250 miles of the passage between Scotland and Norway. By the early summer of 1918 that barrage was at work, and the terror which it inspired in German submarine crews was in all likelihood a contributory cause of the mutinous spirit spreading in the German navy. As for the convoy system, it was the greatest single weapon which the Allies discovered. By the end of the war 607 homeward-bound convoys had been brought in, numbering 9,300 ships, and of these only 73 had been lost; there had been 527 outward-bound convoys, with 7,300 ships, and 45 losses; the total loss was therefore 118 ships, or .7 per cent. Much of this success was due to the superb courage of our merchant seamen, of whom 15,000 lost their lives. "No calculation in any shipping and supply programme included a margin for the human factor. Even when vessels unarmed and without wireless were required to proceed unescorted to waters infested with submarines, crews were always available and willing to sail."\*

So much for the prevention of losses. There was also the positive side, the increase of mercantile tonnage, and its more economical handling, and here the civilian played a not less valuable part than the sailor. By the end of 1917 Britain, France, and Italy had at their disposal a mercantile marine of 18,000,000 tons as compared to 24,500,000 before the war, and of this reduced tonnage 5,500,000 had to be employed in direct war service. In the first quarter of 1918 the excess of losses over new construction was 280,000 tons; in the second quarter, there was a gain for construction of 283,000 tons, and in the third quarter a gain of 468,000 tons. In Britain by the end of 1917 there was a fairly scientific control of supplies, the various demands having been grouped under central authorities like the War Office and the Ministry of Munitions, so that the Ministry of Shipping in allotting transport had not to deal with a host of scattered specialists. The next step was to group the various national controls together and to give them an

international character. This was done by the formation of international committees (on wheat, sugar, oils, etc.), and by the creation in the beginning of 1918 of an Allied Maritime Transport Council — the most useful fruit of the Paris Conference of November 1917. The new Council entered on its duties in the dark days of March 1918, and did invaluable work in allotting tonnage on sound principles, and preventing strife between the Allies over such questions as coal and foodstuffs, munitions and raw materials. It had no tonnage under its direct order except some 500,000 tons of chartered neutral shipping, but its recommendations were accepted by the various national governments. Beginning as an advisory body, it soon became in practice a vast and powerful executive.

The result of these and other measures was that in 1918 the Allies were amply confirmed in their command of the seas. The blockade of Germany was drawn tighter, for with American assistance the agreements with northern neutrals were made more drastic, and Germany, in spite of Russian supplies, was back in the position of 1916. The Allied naval strength had also increased. Britain had added, or was adding, to her Grand Fleet her new battle-cruisers of the *Renown* class, which were capable of a speed of over 30 knots, as well as the battleships now completed from the 1913-14 programme. The United States sent a squadron of dreadnoughts to Scapa — the *New York*, the *Wyoming*, the *Florida*, the *Delaware*, the *Arkansas*, and the *Texas*; and three others — the *Nevada*, the *Oklahoma*, and the *Utah* to Berehaven, in Ireland, in case a German battle-cruiser should slip out and attack her troop convoys.

The events of the winter at sea had not been many. The loss of a convoy of eleven vessels in the North Sea on October 17, 1917, had been followed by the destruction on 11th December in the same waters of a convoy of fourteen. On the evening of 3rd November there was a brilliant little action in the Kattegat, where we sank a German auxiliary cruiser and ten patrol boats. On 17th November our light cruisers were in action in the Heligoland Bight, and two enemy ships were damaged. On January 14, 1918, late in the evening, Yarmouth suffered her third bombardment from the sea. In the last week of that month the south end of the Dardanelles witnessed a curious affair. About 5.30 a.m. on Sunday, 20th January, the British destroyer *Lizard*, being at the moment off the north-east point of Imbros, discovered the German cruiser *Breslau*, with the *Goeben* a mile astern, making for the harbour



where British monitors were lying all unprepared. She engaged the enemy at a range of 11,000 yards, and came under heavy fire, so that she was unable to get within torpedoing distance. Another destroyer, the *Tigress*, came to her aid, and the two attempted to shield the monitors by smoke screens. But their efforts were in vain, and the monitors *Raglan* and *M 28* were speedily sunk, before the former could get her 14-inch American guns into action. The enemy then turned south, followed by the *Lizard* and the *Tigress*, and at 7 a.m. the *Breslau* ran into a minefield, struck several mines, and promptly sank. Four Turkish destroyers appeared, accompanied by an old cruiser, and these the *Lizard* and the *Tigress* engaged and drove up the straits. The *Goeben* continued southward till she found the attentions of our aircraft unpleasant, when she put about to return. In the act she struck a mine, which made her settle down aft and gave her a list of some fifteen degrees. The Turkish destroyers returned to protect her, and she managed to creep inside the straits, followed by the *Lizard* and the *Tigress*, and assiduously bombed by British seaplanes. Her captain ran her ashore in the Narrows to the west of Nagara Point, where she lay for some days under the menace of our aircraft, till she was eventually tinkered up and refloated.

The opening of the German offensive on 21st March had been attended by the bombardment of Dunkirk from the sea. Meantime, a plan had been maturing to get rid of the intolerable menace presented by the use of the Flanders ports as German bases. A year before Jellicoe had declared his hope that the problem of the Belgian coast was not insoluble; and a new man had appeared who had the Elizabethan tradition of inspired audacity. Sir Roger Keyes had been the most trusted of Sir Rosslyn Wemyss's lieutenants in the Dardanelles campaign, and, like his leader, he interpreted generously the limits of what was possible for the British sailor. His appointment, first to the Plans department of the Admiralty, and then, in succession to Admiral Bacon, to the command of the Dover Patrol, augured well for a new phase of initiative and daring. The strategical importance of closing up Zeebrugge and Ostend was patent. There nested the German destroyer flotillas which raided the Narrow Seas and occupied most of the time of the Dover Patrol. Our chief weapon against the U-boat was the destroyer, and the presence of German craft in these ports withdrew a large number of British destroyers from the anti-submarine campaign. Could Zeebrugge and Ostend be put out of action, the German naval base would be pushed back three

hundred miles to Emden, and the British east coast ports would become the natural bases from which to deal with the attacks by enemy surface craft on the Channel. It would not cut off the main bases of the U-boats, but it would release the forces of the Dover Patrol to hunt them down, and it would facilitate the construction of a new Channel mine barrage.

A plan had been under consideration since November 1917, and the advent of Sir Roger Keyes brought it rapidly to completion. Its purpose was to block the end of the Bruges Canal at Zeebrugge and the entrance of Ostend harbour — an operation such as in the Spanish-American War Lieutenant Hobson had attempted at Santiago. To understand the details it is necessary to examine the topography of the two places.

Zeebrugge is not a port so much as the sea end of the Bruges Canal, and in the canal the enemy submarines found perfect harbourage. Its mouth was flanked by two short piers or sea walls with a lighthouse at the end of each, and half a mile up the canal were the lock gates. A large mole had been built in a curve to the west of the channel — a mole about eighty yards wide and a mile long. At the land end, to allow for the flow of the tide, there were five hundred yards of viaduct on piles. The Mole, as the vital defence of the harbour, had a normal garrison of a thousand men, and bristled with artillery and machine guns, while all the coast was studded with long-range heavy pieces. On the Mole were the railway station and many newly built sheds for military and naval stores. The Ostend harbour was less elaborate. It was also the mouth of a canal to Bruges, but there was no mole as a flank guard. The problem for Sir Roger Keyes in both cases was to sink ships inside the canal, so that, aided by the silt of the tides, they should block the entrance. It is no light task to clear an obstruction from a Channel port; about Christmas 1916 a rice-laden tramp sank in Boulogne harbour, and shut the place for a month. Could the operation be achieved the results were certain; but, in view of the strong defence, it seemed a desperate adventure, especially among the intricacies of Zeebrugge.

As it turned out, Ostend was the more difficult problem, for the very complexity of its safeguards made Zeebrugge vulnerable. The plan at Ostend was simply to get ships into the harbour and sink them far enough in to do the maximum of damage. It was a feat depending on secrecy and dash. At Zeebrugge the scheme was more elaborate. Three cruisers packed with concrete were to get as near the lock gates as possible before being sunk. To create

# N O R T H   S E A



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## ZEEBRUGGE.

(Facing p. 242.)



W. T. H. S. A.



SEABROOK

NEW HAMPSHIRE

a diversion, other vessels were to attack the Mole from its sea side and land men to engage the enemy garrison and prevent the guns there being used against the block-ships. At the same time, by means of a submarine laden with explosives, it was proposed to blow up the viaduct, which would isolate the German garrison on the Mole. The Zeebrugge attack was, therefore, planned in three stages — the attack on the Mole, the simultaneous attack on the viaduct, and the later entry of the block-ships into the canal mouth.\*

Twice Sir Roger Keyes's flotilla started, and twice it put back to port. It needed special weather conditions for success — an overcast sky, a drift of haze, a light wind, and a short sea. On Monday, 22nd April, the eve of St. George's Day, the omens were favourable, and in the late afternoon, three hours before sunset, the expedition started, timed to reach Zeebrugge by midnight. It was a singular Armada. There were five old cruisers to act as block-ships — the *Intrepid*, *Iphigenia*, and *Thetis* for Zeebrugge, and the *Brilliant* and the *Sirius* for Ostend. A small cruiser, the *Vindictive* (5,600 tons, with a broadside of six 6-inch guns), was designed for the attack on the Mole, assisted by two Liverpool ferry-boats, the *Daffodil* and the *Iris*. There was also a flotilla of monitors, motor launches, and fast coastal motor boats for special purposes. Admiral Tyrwhitt's destroyers from Harwich covered the operations from the north, and there were present light covering forces from the Dover Patrol. The operations were commanded by Sir Roger Keyes in the destroyer *Warwick*, and he had also with him the destroyers *North Star* and *Phæbe*. The men for the block-ships and the landing-parties were bluejackets and marines, picked from a great number who had volunteered for the work. They were armed as for a land battle, with grenades and flame-throwers as well as rifles and bayonets; the *Vindictive* carried machine guns, Stokes mortars, and howitzers; and elaborate preparations had been made for the creation of an artificial fog to cover the attack.

It was a prodigious hazard to approach a hostile coast where navigation was difficult at the best of times, without lights, without knowledge of what new minefields the enemy might have laid, and at the mercy of a change in the weather which would expose the little fleet to every gun on the Flanders shore. There was

\* In the expedition to Ostend in 1798, under Captain H. R. Popham, R. N., troops were landed under General Eyre Coote to blow up the sluice-gates of the Bruges Canal. They succeeded in doing this, but could not re-embark through stress of weather, and were compelled to surrender.

only an hour and a half for the whole operation, for the shore batteries — 120 heavy guns, some of them 15-inch — had a range of sixteen miles, and the return voyage must start at 1.30, to be out of danger before dawn. All went well on the outward voyage. Before dark Sir Roger Keyes signalled "St. George for England," to which the *Vindictive* replied, "May we give the dragon's tail a damned good twist!" Presently the *Sirius* and the *Brilliant* changed course for Ostend, and the smoke-screen, provided by the smaller craft, rolled landwards with the north-east wind ahead of the cruisers. Meantime the monitors and seaplanes had gone to work, bombarding the coast defences, as they had done often before. This device apparently deceived the enemy. He did not man the Mole, and his gunners retired to their bomb-proof shelters on shore, knowing well that in face of the smoke-screen they could not reply effectively to our fire. It was a case where an artillery "preparation" lulled instead of awakening the enemy's suspicions.

But fifteen minutes before the *Vindictive* reached the Mole the wind changed to the south-west, and rolled back the smoke-screen so that the whole harbour was clear to our eyes and we to the enemy's. Instantly the darkness was made bright with starshells and searchlight, and from the Mole and the shore an intense fire greeted our vessels. There was no time to be lost, and the *Vindictive*, under Captain A. F. B. Carpenter, laid her nose against the concrete sea wall of the Mole. Her port side had been fitted with "brows" — light hinged drawbridges which could drop their ends on the wall. A sudden sea had risen, which made the operation difficult; so after the *Vindictive* had let go an anchor she signalled the *Daffodil* to lie against her stern and keep it in position, while the *Iris* went forward to make fast to the Mole ahead of her. All the time a tornado of fire was beating on the three vessels, and to land men under such conditions might well have seemed impossible. But the marines and bluejackets, under their gallant leaders, swarmed over the splintering gangways, and dropped on to the shell-swept wall. The *Daffodil*, which should have landed her own men after berthing the *Vindictive*, was compelled to remain on the latter's starboard, pressing her into position, while her men crossed the *Vindictive* to join the storming-party; and the *Iris*, which should have made fast ahead of the *Vindictive*, found her grappels too small, and had to fall in astern.

The storming-parties moved along the Mole, finding no Germans, but subject to the same withering fire from the shore end. Steadily, methodically, they blew up one building after another. A German



destroyer lay on the harbour side of the Mole, and was promptly blown up by our bombs. And then suddenly ahead of them a column of flame leapt into the air, and they knew that the viaduct had gone. An old submarine, C 3 (Lieutenant R. D. Sandford), had steered straight for the viaduct under the enemy's searchlights and under constant fire — an anxious task, for the thing was full of explosives. The viaduct itself was crowded with the enemy, who watched the little vessel approaching as if stupefied by its audacity. Apparently they thought that it was trying to get through the viaduct into the harbour. Lieutenant Sandford rammed his boat into the hole left for the tide in the steel curtain, touched the button, got into a skiff, and won clear away. There was no more gallant exploit in all that marvellous night.

The landing-parties on the Mole pushed on to the ragged edge of what had once been the viaduct, steadily pursuing the work of destruction. The lighthouse was taken, and there Wing-Commander Brock, who had organized the smoke-screen, was last seen, desperately wounded but still fighting. Suddenly the German fire seemed to be concentrated more on the harbour, and as they looked eastward they saw the reason. The block-ships were steering straight for the canal. The *Thetis* (Commander Sneyd) went first to show the way, but she had the misfortune to foul her propeller in the defence nets. She signalled a warning to the others, and then, pounded at by the shore batteries, was sunk in the channel some hundreds of yards from the canal mouth. Meantime the *Intrepid* (Lieutenant Stuart Bonham-Carter), with every gun in action, and belching smoke like a volcano, steered into the canal, and, resting her nose on the mud of the western bank, blew up and settled down neatly athwart the channel. The *Iphigenia* (Lieutenant Billyard-Leake) followed, a little confused by the *Intrepid's* smoke, rammed a dredger, and continued, dredger and all, on her consort's heels. She beached on the eastern side, swung across the canal, and was blown up. The crews of these vessels retired in every kind of small craft, and, for the most part, were picked up by the destroyers sheltering behind the smoke-screen.

The signal arranged for re-embarkation had been a blast from the *Vindictive's* siren. But the *Vindictive* had long ago lost her siren, so the *Daffodil* did the best she could with her hooter. What was left of the landing-parties clambered aboard; the *Daffodil* towed the *Vindictive* loose, and the flotilla turned for home. The intensity of the German fire redoubled, but the changed wind now served us well, and the smoke clouds cloaked our departure. The

heavy guns between Zeebrugge and Ostend did not find their mark, and the raiders, led by the battered *Vindictive*, were presently in English waters.

The Ostend operation, under Commodore Hubert Lynes, was less successful, for there the block-ships could not be assisted by any containing action, such as that on the Zeebrugge Mole, to distract the enemy. Our motor boats lit flares on the ends of the piers, and concealed them from the shore end by a smoke-screen. Unhappily, the veer of the wind blew aside the screen and revealed the flares, which the enemy promptly extinguished by gunfire. The *Brilliant* and the *Sirius* failed to find the entrance to the harbour, and were compelled to sink themselves four hundred yards east of the piers and more than a mile from the true canal mouth.

By the morning of St. George's Day the main part of the great venture had been successfully accomplished. Zeebrugge and the Bruges Canal were blocked, and it did not appear how, under the constant assaults of our aircraft, they could ever be cleared. The quality of the British navy had been triumphantly vindicated, and in the darkest days of the war on land the hard-pressed Allies were given assurance that their Fleet was still master of the seas, and the final barrier to a German victory. For the gallantry of all concerned — the marines on the Mole, the crews of the block-ships and of the *Vindictive* and her consorts, the men in the picket boats and motor launches — no words of praise are adequate. The affair will rank in history among the classic exploits of sea warfare. But in admiration for the human quality shown, the technical brilliance of the feat should not be forgotten. From its nature it could not be rehearsed. It demanded a number of conditions which involved for their concomitance an indefinite period of waiting, and in such a continued tension secrecy on the one hand and ardour on the other are not easy to preserve. It required an intricate plan, worked out to minute details, any one of which was at the mercy of unforeseeable accident. Sir Roger Keyes succeeded by taking every human precaution, and then trusting to the luck of the Navy; and it is hard to know whether the more to admire his admirable caution or his admirable hardihood.

The saga of the Flanders coast was not finished. To be forewarned is not always to be forearmed. A surprise may be achieved so audacious that it is confidently assumed that it cannot be repeated; but the mere fact of this assumption may be the occasion of a second surprise. The Germans at Ostend had removed all guiding marks for attacking ships, had cut gaps in the piers to

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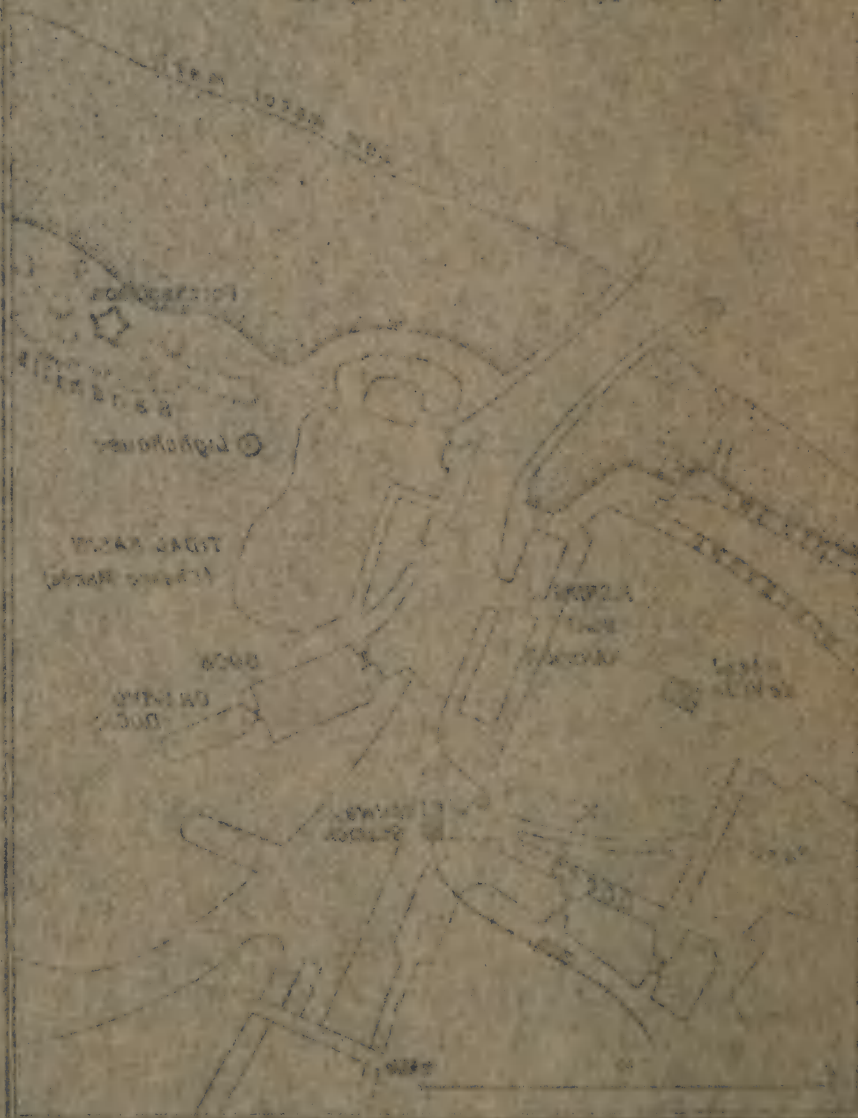
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## OSTEND.

(Facing p. 246.)



# W. H. T. A.



OSTEND

(W. H. T. A.)

prevent a repetition of the landing on Zeebrugge Mole, and had a flotilla of nine destroyers watching the bit of coast. A second attack there was to the enemy unthinkable, and therefore Sir Roger Keyes attempted it.

The second affair was planned as methodically as the first. It was, as before, under the command of Commodore Hubert Lynes, and Sir Roger Keyes was also present in the *Warwick*. About midnight on Thursday, 9th May, they left the British coast with a number of monitors, destroyers, and motor boats, and, as block-ships, the old cruiser *Sappho* and the *Vindictive*, now on her last voyage. It was a windless spring night, with a quiet sea and a sky lit with faint stars. Unfortunately the *Sappho* broke down on the way and did not reach her destination in time, thereby halving the British chances. The commodore's destroyer hurried ahead, laid a light buoy, and then fell back, while the *Vindictive* in the charge of the smaller craft approached the shore. They saw before them a beacon burning, a flare which one of our coastal motor boats had hung in the rigging of the sunken *Sirius*.

There was no preliminary bombardment till fifteen minutes before the block-ships were due at the harbour mouth. At that moment two motor boats dashed in and torpedoed the ends of the high wooden piers, and on the signal the airplanes watching in the heavens began their bombardment, and the great shells from our monitors shrieked into the town. Our smoke clouds were loosed, and blinded the searchlights and the observation of the German batteries. And on their heels came the real thing, a dense sea fog, which blanketed everything, and forced our destroyers to use their sirens to keep in touch. The solitary block-ship, the *Vindictive*, was hard put to it to find the entrance. She wandered east and west under a hail of shrapnel fire from the shore, groping for the harbour mouth, and at last found it and steamed in. The enemy batteries had discovered her, and she was terribly wounded, while the machine guns of the piers raked her decks. She laid her nose to the eastern pier, and was preparing to swing across the channel when a shell destroyed her conning-tower. It appeared that she could not swing farther round, and there was nothing for it but to sink her, lying at an angle of some twenty-five degrees to the eastern pier. There remained a passage between her and the western pier, too narrow to be used by destroyers or the larger submarines. Most of her crew were got off in motor launches, the commanders of which behaved with the utmost gallantry, and at 2.30 on the morning of Friday, the 10th, the recall rockets went

up and the flotilla turned for home. The nine German destroyers had been discreet, and had not shown themselves throughout the action. The *Vindictive* was triumphant in her death as in her life, and the second of the two great West Flanders bases was now lost to the enemy.

Zeebrugge and Ostend were the last nails in the coffin of the German navy. It seemed all but incredible that along with the great German land attack in France and Flanders there should not be some attempt at action by the ships from Kiel and Wilhelmshaven. If Germany was staking everything on victory, surely she must stake her Fleet. It did not come. The British reserves were ferried across the Channel without interference. Britain herself attacked by sea two most vital bases and ruined them irrevocably, and still the great battleships gave no sign. At the moment it was a mystery, but six months later that mystery was explained. The German fleet had ceased to be more than a name. The sleepless activity of Sir David Beatty had paralyzed its heart. In the first six months of 1918 over a hundred surface craft were lost in the Bight of Heligoland. Minelayers, mine-sweepers, patrol boats — they were being driven from the seas; they mutinied, and the mutiny was suppressed; but the spirit and discipline necessary for the most arduous of human tasks had gone from their men. The use of foul weapons had ruined the *moral* of sailors who had done gallantly at Coronel and the Dogger Bank and Jutland, for the ancient law of Poseidon cannot be broken without disaster to the breaker. Already the British Admiralty knew what the German Marineamt only dimly guessed, that the first order given to prepare a fleet action would for the German navy be the signal for revolution.



## CHAPTER XCV

### THE LAST ENEMY OFFENSIVE

*May 26-July 18, 1918*

Opinion in Germany in Early Summer of 1918—Ludendorff's Next Stage—The Third Battle of the Aisne—Germans reach the Marne—First American Troops in Action—The Stand on the Ourcq and at Rheims—Hutier's Attack on Lassigny Hills—Austria's Last Offensive—Austrian and Italian Dispositions—The Attack of 15th June—Hoetzendorff's Failure at Asiago—Boroevitch's Initial Success on the Piave—The Italian Counter-stroke—Results of the Battle—Foch's Last Defensive Action—Ludendorff's Culminating Effort—The Second Battle of the Marne—The American Part—Mangin's Counter-attack of 18th July—The First Step to Victory.

#### I

THE success of their armies on the West had during April and May keyed the German people to a high pitch of confidence. All talk of democracy and the liberalizing of the constitution had been silenced by the shouts of triumph. For the moment the High Command were again the idols of the populace, and the Hohenzollerns shared in their glory. A "German peace" would be made before the leaves fell, and those who had been most clamorous for a peace by negotiation were the speediest and noisiest in their recantation. It would be easy to cull from the writings and speeches of German leaders an anthology of vainglory. "The thing is over," said Hindenburg on 25th March. "We have put a ring about the British islands," said Helfferich on 24th April—"a ring which every day is drawn closer, and we shall bring the war to a decision in the west of France and on the waters about England." On the same day, in answer to President Wilson, he declared, "He shall have it, force to the utmost, force without stint or limit." In the Prussian Diet Count Yorck von Wartenberg announced: "We have had enough of stretching out the hand of peace. It was not by renunciation and agreement, but by power of arms that the state of Frederick and Bismarck was made great."

The *Vorwärts* joined in the pæan. "We welcome this victory in the West with special joy, because we believe that it must destroy for the Western peoples the last remnants of blindness and false hopes of success. The psychological moment has now arrived when their war-will must collapse." But the most interesting testimony came from a curious book published in the spring, in which deputies of all parties, except the Minority Socialists, expounded their faith. "The fundamental condition for all of us," said one socialist, "is that Germany shall remain the conqueror in the world's war." "The peace in the East," said another, "has broken up the coalition against us." "The war," wrote a member of the Centre, "was never anything else but an economic duel between Germany and England, and the result must be a greater Germany, with ample economic and territorial guarantees." The National Liberals clamoured for indemnities. "For reasons alike of law and morality it is evident that the German people must be better off after the war than before." As for the Pan-Germans, they wanted everything — the Meuse, Belgium, the Balkans, colossal payments. "The interests of Germany must be satisfied without any consideration for the interests of foreign peoples." And all were agreed that the only way to these good things was by a decisive field victory.

This unanimity of press and platform was scarcely an index to the feeling of the average German citizen. The truth was that he was very weary. He considered that he had done enough "pour chauffer la gloire," and he no longer thrilled to the confident dispatches of the High Command and the Emperor's grandiosities. He wanted peace above all things — after victory, if possible, but peace in any case — a dangerous mood for a conquering Power. Moreover, his mind had been unsettled by the nicely calculated Allied propaganda, and his nerve was being shaken by the daring air raids which the British Independent Air Force was now conducting as far afield as Cologne. Hitherto he had rejoiced at the bombing of Paris and London, but it had been the boast of his rulers that war would never enter the German frontiers, and this looked unpleasantly like a failure of the promise. There were doubting Thomases also in high places. Kuhlmann had never concealed his opinion that the victory in the West which Ludendorff had guaranteed could not be attained. He had not the confidence of his colleagues in the tardiness of America, and he had ugly premonitions that his diplomacy in the East had been less triumphant than he had at first imagined. He would

have preferred to stand on the defensive in the West, husband the German reserves, and finish the work in Russia. For it was now becoming clear that the iron fist in the Ukraine was too rough to reap the fruits for which he had looked, and that Bolshevism, which he had alternately flattered and bullied, was like to be a broken reed for German statecraft to lean upon.

But Ludendorff had put his hand to the plough, and there could be no turning back. The stagnation of May was not part of his plan, but a sheer necessity to enable him to fill up the gaps in his ranks. He had lost something over a half a million of men — not, indeed, more than he had bargained for, but in that bargain he had assumed a success which was still denied him. By the last week of May he had replaced more than 70 per cent. of his losses from men returned from hospitals, from prisoners sent home from Russia, and from the first part of the 1920 class. He had still the strategic initiative and the priceless advantage of interior lines. He had not changed his main purpose. He still aimed at separating the British and French armies, and for him the vital terrain was still the Somme. But he did not consider that the time was ripe for the final blow, and he resolved to repeat his Lys strategy, and strike first in a different area, with the object of exhausting Foch's reserves and stripping bare his centre. There were many inducements to this course. Repeated blows at widely separated sections would compel the moving of Allied supports round the big outer edge of the salient; would certainly give him local successes; and might, in the precarious position of the Allies, supply just that finishing stroke which would disintegrate their entire defence. He and his colleagues had always Russia in mind. He had treated the Russian front in this way, and by-and-by had come the Revolution when the heart and limbs of Russia failed her. Might not the sentimental democracies of the West be driven down the same road? He had still some five months of campaigning before him, and he did not believe that America would prove a serious factor in the war before the winter. His time limits were inexorable, but the allowance seemed still sufficient.

The new terrain must be of the same type as the Lys — that is, it must be sufficiently remote from the centre to make reinforcement difficult, and it must threaten some vital possession of the Allies. He found such an area in the Heights of the Aisne. It was the nearest point to Paris; it was a path to the Marne; and an advance beyond the latter river would cut the Paris-Châlons railways and imperil the whole French front in Champagne. He



could concentrate troops for the attack in the angle of the salient, so that, as on 21st March, the Allies could not guess his intention. And, having renewed his shock troops, he could once again use the deadly tactics of March, to which Foch as yet seemed to have found no answer. His aim was to create a broad pocket in the direction of the Marne; then he proposed to make a similar pocket on the right towards Compiègne; and finally in a great combined movement to unite these two pockets with the Montdidier salient, and so sound the doom of Amiens and Paris.

About the 20th of May the army group of the Imperial Crown Prince had mustered some forty divisions for the attempt, twenty-five for the first wave and fifteen in reserve. The two armies allotted to the task were: on the right, the VII. Army, under von Boehn; and, on the left, the I. Army, under Fritz von Below. They lay between the Ailette and Rheims, wholly to the north and east of the plateau; while on the heights was part of the French Sixth Army, under General Maistre, with only the 11th Corps of four divisions in line. On the French right lay the British 9th Corps, under Sir A. Hamilton-Gordon, which had been recently withdrawn from Flanders. It held the California plateau and Craonne, and extended as far south as Berméricourt, with three divisions in line — the 50th, 8th, and 21st, and the 25th in reserve on the left wing. Around Rheims lay the French Fifth Army, with, on its right, Gouraud's Fourth Army extending into Champagne. The British divisions, which were depleted and tired after their two months' struggle, had been brought for the purpose of rest to this section, which Foch had called "a quiet place on the Aisne." The weakness of the Allied front — seven divisions to hold a line of thirty miles — was due to the exigencies of the great battle; for unless the defence possesses a real superiority of numbers it must be content to be thin at those points where it is favoured by the configuration of the ground, and the heights of the Chemin des Dames were assumed by the French to be all but impregnable. Further, Foch was convinced that the enemy would renew his attacks between Montdidier and Arras, and the British Staff seem to have been alone in the forecast that the Aisne would be the area selected.

We have seen that Ludendorff began the Lys battle with an attack of nine divisions, a modest complement suitable for a subsidiary operation. We have seen, too, that he was gradually drawn by his initial success into a gross expenditure of men. The new plan marked a further weakening in the rigour of his

first strategy. A thirty-mile front and twenty-five divisions of assault were on a scale too great for a legitimate diversion. He still held to his main plan, but he was beginning to hesitate in his methods, and he had chosen an ill place for one prone to temptation. For Paris lay in the south-west beyond the forests, and the lure of a capital city is hard to resist for the soldier, and harder for the politicians behind him. He employed many of the same troops, including three divisions of the Prussian Guard, as had led the assault on 21st March. Both in the secrecy of his concentration and in the precision of his new tactics he far exceeded his previous record. Never, perhaps, during the whole campaign did the great German war machine move so noiselessly and so fast.

On the evening of Sunday, 26th May, all was quiet in the threatened area; and it was not till 5 p.m. that the French learned from two prisoners of the blow that was preparing. At one o'clock on the morning of Monday, the 27th, a sharp bombardment, principally with gas shells, began everywhere from the Ailette to the suburbs of Rheims. At four o'clock the infantry advanced, assisted to the east of Craonne by tanks, and in an hour or two had swept the French from the crest of the ridge. The odds were too desperate, and the four weak French divisions were smothered under weight of numbers and artillery. The 11th Corps early in the morning was back on the southern slopes of the heights, and by the afternoon was on the Aisne itself, five miles from its old positions. By 8 a.m. three French divisions from the reserve had attempted to hold a line on the southern bank of the river covering the crossings. They were swept aside, and the German vanguard crossed by the French bridges, and before nightfall had reached the Vesle: a total advance of twelve miles, and greatly beyond anything that had been accomplished on 21st March. By the evening the French front ran from the Ailette, near Leuilly, by Neuville-sur-Margival to the Aisne at Condé, and then in a crescent on the southern bank by Braisne, Quincy, and Mont-Notre-Dame to south of Fismes. Large numbers of prisoners and an immense store of booty had fallen into Boehn's hands.

At first Fritz von Below fared less well against the British 9th Corps. It was forced back to its second position, but resisted gallantly for most of the day. All its divisions were battle-weary: the 8th had held the line of the Somme on 24th March against the Brandenburgers, and a month later had shared in the fighting at Villers Bretonneux; the 21st had fought at Epéhy and at Voormezele; the 25th had been in action in March on the

Bapaume-Cambrai road, and in April at Ploegsteert Wood, at Neuve Eglise, and at Kemmel; the 50th had been engaged throughout the St. Quentin retreat, and most furiously on the Lys on 9th April. The 21st, between Cormicy and Berméricourt, with a French Colonial Division on its right, held its ground throughout the day. The 8th, around Berry-au-Bac, stood firm till the afternoon, when the pressure on the west forced it across the river. The 50th, at Craonne, had the hardest task of all, for the retreat of the French uncovered its left flank, and it was slowly driven back to the Aisne, after making a heroic effort to recapture the Craonne plateau. That evening the line of the 9th Corps ran from Berméricourt westward through Cormicy and Bouffignereux, to link up precariously with the French north-east of Fismes.

The battle had now reached the district of the Tardenois, that upland which is the watershed between Aisne and Marne. The countryside is broken up into many hollows, but the centre is open and full of excellent roads. On the west and south-west lie big patches of forest, of which the great wood of Villers-Cotterets is the chief. It is cut in the middle by the stream of the Ourcq, flowing westward, and farther east by the long and shallow valley of the Vesle. On the south it breaks down sharply to the Marne, and an enemy coming from the north by the plateau commands all the flatter southern shore.

The sudden success was beyond Ludendorff's expectations, for he had hoped at the most to reach Fismes and Soissons. He now resolved to push for the Marne at his best speed; but the difficulty lay with his flanks. So long as Soissons and Rheims held out he would be forced by every day's advance into a narrowing salient. His advantage was that the French line had been completely broken, and that some days must elapse before serious resistance could be made to his triumphant centre. At all costs he must broaden the salient, and on the 28th he succeeded in forcing back the containing Allied wings. On his right he drove the French to the line Venizel-Serches-Lesges, and on his left he compelled the British 9th Corps to retire to positions running well south of the Vesle by Crugny to Muizon.\* In the centre the French were south of Lhuys and Chéry and Courville. He did more, for on his extreme right, between the Aisne and the Ailette, he captured Sancy, and won a line from Pont St. Mard by Terno to Bray. He was now on the heights overlooking

\* The night the British 19th Division was brought up in busses to the Ardre valley to fill a gap in the French line.



# THE THIRD BATTLE OF THE AISNE.

(Facing p. 25+)



# THE THIRD BATTLE OF THE AINIE

THE AINIE

Soissons from the north and close on the town in the river flats to the east.

That day an event happened which might well have given food for thought to the German Command. American troops had been before this date engaged in minor actions in Lorraine, but now for the first time they took part in the main battle. General Bullard's 1st American Division, brigaded with the French First Army, attacked in the Montdidier section, and took the village of Cantigny, along with some hundreds of prisoners. Three furious counter-attacks by the enemy failed to retake the place. It was much that a new division should thus neatly and efficiently carry out an offensive, but that it should be able to consolidate and hold its gains was a real achievement and a happy augury for the future. When in March Pershing had made his generous offer to Foch, he had had only four divisions at his command. Now he had the better part of a dozen ready for the line, and fresh troops at the rate of more than a quarter of a million a month were crossing the Atlantic.

On Wednesday, the 29th, the broadening of the salient began in earnest, and Soissons fell. All the day before it had been hotly shelled, and in some places set on fire; and on the morning of the 29th the enemy, strengthened by fresh divisions, pushed in from the east and entered its streets. They were driven out after severe fighting, but returned to the attack in the afternoon, and compelled the French to retire to the plateau west and south of the town. Fritz von Below, on the German left, had also increased his forces, and succeeded in pressing the British and French troops on the Allied right off the upland of St. Thierry. That day there was a general falling back everywhere, and at night the Allied line ran from La Neuville north of Rheims, well to the south of Crugny, south of Arcis le Ponsart, through the station of Fère-en-Tardenois, and then north-west by Cuiry-Housse, Septmonts, and Belleau, to the west of Soissons, and so to Juvigny and Pont St. Mard.

Next day the German centre made a strong forward thrust. It was the second main attack of the battle, and its aims were to reach the Marne, and to destroy the two pillars of the Allied front at Soissons and Rheims. The first was immediately successful. During the morning the German vanguard appeared on the hills above the Marne between Château-Thierry and Dormans, and by the evening the enemy was in possession of some ten miles of the north bank of the river, with posts on the south side. He was less fortunate on his flanks. He failed entirely to debouch from



Soissons. In the east La Neuvillele fell, and he won a foothold in Bétheny, but he was checked in front of Rheims. That night the Allied front lay from Rheims by Vrigny and Ville-en-Tardenois to Dormans; then along the right bank of the Marne to just east of Château-Thierry; then north-west by Oulchy-la-Ville, Missy-au-Bois, Tartiers, and Guny to the original line at Pontoise.

Ludendorff had now cause to consider his position. His achievement had been brilliant — an advance of over thirty miles in seventy-two hours, the occupation of ten miles of the Marne bank, between 30,000 and 40,000 prisoners, and some 400 guns. But there were anxious elements in his success. He had used up most of the fresh divisions of the Crown Prince's reserve, and though Prince Rupprecht had twenty more, and Würtemberg and Gallwitz at least four fresh divisions to spare, it would be unwise to squander the total mass of manœuvre in what had been intended as a diversion. But the position won was such that it offered no safe resting-place; the battle must be continued, or the gains relinquished. It is an accepted rule that a salient on a formed front should not be in depth more than a third of its base. But Boehn had far exceeded this proportion, and he found himself forced through too narrow a gate. There was nothing for it but to carry away the gate-posts — to halt the centre while the flanks came into line.

The more dangerous wing was the German right, which followed roughly the high road from Soissons to Château-Thierry. If Boehn could press out in that direction he would enlarge the borders of his salient, and, by outflanking the Soissons heights, break down that vital gate-post. Accordingly, on the morning of the 31st he performed the military operation known as "forming front to a flank." He drove back the French from the southern bank of the Oise and Aisne Canal between Guny and Noyon, and he pressed down the valley of the Ourcq as far as Neuilly St. Front. North of that point his front ran by Vierzy to Missy, and south of it through Bois-du-Châtelet and Verdilly to the north-east of Château-Thierry. Next day, Saturday, 1st June, it was the turn of Fritz von Below, who attacked at Rheims with tanks on the left flank of the German salient and at first made ground. A French counter-attack later in the day drove him back and captured four of his tanks. North-west of Soissons Boehn made a half-hearted effort, and south-west of the town the French won back some ground, and checked further enemy progress down the south bank of the Aisne. On Sunday, 2nd June, both German armies made a resolute attempt to break the gate-posts. Below,

with five divisions, attacked at Vrigny, south-west of Rheims, but failed to advance. Boehn drove hard against the western flank, occupied the northern part of Château-Thierry and the high riverside ground as far as Chézy-sur-Marne, and enlarged his holding farther north in the neighbourhood of Chézy-en-Orzois.

But he made no progress down the Ourcq, for the French had brought up reserves in that area, and had found a line which they could defend. Foch had been slow to reinforce the threatened front, for he had, in the first place, to make certain that the enemy attack was not a feint. On 30th May he ordered the Tenth Army to Villers-Cotterets, and brought Robillot's 1st Cavalry Corps to the Ourcq. General Bundy's 2nd and General Dickman's 3rd American Divisions were used to strengthen the Marne line. Just east of the great forest of Villers-Cotterets runs the little river Savières, in a deep gorge with precipitous sides. It falls into the Ourcq at Troesnes, whence an irregular line of heights stretches southward in front of Passy and Torcy. All this line, which was of some strength, was recaptured by the French by the Sunday evening, with the exception of the hamlet of Faverolles, where the Germans had still a footing. That day marked the farthest limit of Boehn's success in this area, for, though he continued his efforts for another week, he made comparatively small progress. The Crown Prince had used forty-one divisions in the week's battle, and had practically exhausted his own reserves, but he had not drawn upon the resources of the neighbouring group commanders. The situation was still very grave, for the French line had been greatly lengthened, it bristled with vulnerable points, and there was scanty room to manœuvre. Paris was dangerously near the new front, and the loss of Paris meant far more than the loss of a capital. Earlier in the campaign the great city might have fallen without bringing upon the Allies irreparable disaster; but in the past two years it was in the environs of Paris that many of the chief new munition factories had arisen. If these were lost the Allied strength would be grievously crippled, and after four years of war it was doubtful whether France had the power to replace them. Already the loss in *matériel* had been severe, for the country between the Aisne and the Marne was full of munition dumps and aerodromes. But the stubborn soul of him who was now Premier of France would not admit a tremor. On 4th June Clemenceau told the Chamber: "Je me bats devant Paris; je me bats à Paris; je me bats derrière Paris."

On Monday, the 3rd, there was heavy fighting around Torcy,

where the Germans tried to push down the little valley of the Clignon; around Faverolles; and on the Chaudun plateau, south-west of Soissons, where Boehn was endeavouring to turn the Villers-Cotterets forest by its northern end. The struggle was bitter; but the French reaction had clearly begun, and on their extreme left they recovered the southern part of the hill of Choisy, which overlooks the Oise. On the Tuesday there was a lull, and on Wednesday, the 5th, the French repulsed an attempt to cross the Oise near Mont Lagache. The American 2nd Division, at the south-west corner of the salient, counter-attacked with success west of Torcy on Thursday, the 6th, took Bouresches and part of Belleau Wood, and forced the Germans back a mile, while that night the British 19th Division \* retook the village of Bligny, eight miles to the south-west of Rheims. That night the French and part of the American 3rd Division captured the important Hill 204 above Château-Thierry. Boehn had exhausted his strength, and had called a halt; and, according to their practice in such lulls, the Germans announced the results of their victory — 55,000 prisoners and 650 guns. They were clearly preparing a blow elsewhere, and Foch waited anxiously for news of it.

## II

It came on the morning of Sunday, the 9th, and in the quarter expected, the area of Humbert's Third Army. This time it was the turn of Hutier. It had proved impossible to carry away the gate-posts by means of the two armies already engaged, so it was necessary to bring the force on their right into action. At midnight on the 8th an intense bombardment began in the Montdidier-Noyon section, and at dawn on the 9th the German XVIII. Army attacked with fifteen divisions on a front of twenty-five miles. In the next three days three more divisions were drawn in, and of the eighteen five were from the reserves of Prince Rupprecht.

The Allied front between Montdidier and Noyon had for its main feature the group of low hills south of Lassigny, between the streams of the Matz and the Oise. West of the Matz the line ran through an open country of ploughland and rolling downs.

\* The general commanding the French Fifth Army paid the following tribute to the British 9th Corps: "They have enabled us to establish a barrier against which the hostile waves have beaten and shattered themselves. This none of the French who witnessed it will ever forget."



East of it the front curved round the northern skirts of the hills, which were thickly wooded and rose to some 400 feet above the surrounding levels. They formed a continuous ridge except at their western end, where one summit was separated from the rest by a sharp valley, with the village of Gury at its northern extremity. If Hutier could thrust down the Matz he would turn the uplands, and so get rid of the chief natural obstacle between him and Compiègne. The main strategic object of Ludendorff was now to secure a front from which he could threaten Paris. Already his greater scheme, though not consciously relinquished, was growing dim, and the lure of the capital was overmastering him. Further, he had to release Boehn from the awkward narrows in which he was wedged.

On most of the front of attack Hutier failed, for there was no element of surprise, and Foch was ready for him. But in the centre along the Matz there was a local success. The enemy advanced some three miles, took the isolated hill above Gury, and got as far as the village of Ressons, in the south. Next day the three miles became six, and the Germans were in Marquéglise and Elincourt, in the centre; on their left they entered the Bois de Thiescourt; and on their right took the villages of Méry, Belloy, and St. Maur. The extreme French left, between Rubescourt and Courcelles, stood firm. That evening the French front ran from Mesnil St. Georges, in the west, by Le Ployron, Courcelles, Marest, Montigny, and La Bernardie, to the south of Cannectancourt. The battle was one of dogged resistance, and, for the enemy, slow and costly progress, very different to the Aisne action a fortnight before. But Foch could not afford to take risks, so that night he shortened his line by evacuating the salient south of Noyon, between Nampcel and Montigny. Drastic measures were also taken for the defence of Paris.

It was blazing June weather, the ground was bone-dry, and all the conditions favoured the attackers. But a new thing had begun to appear in the campaign. The enemy pursued his former tactics, but they were less successful. The French — Mangin \* with five divisions — were notably quick in counter-attack, and this discomfited the shock troops in their infiltration, for it is small use finding weak spots in a front if you are checked before you can take advantage of them. The French reserves were still scanty, and the defence was still heavily outnumbered, but the odds were

\* He told his men before the attack: "L'opération de demain doit être la fin de la bataille défensive . . . elle doit marquer l'arrêt des Allemands, la reprise de l'offensive, et aboutir au succès."

not so fantastic as in March and April, while in their hundreds of thousands America was landing her troops, and her first divisions had already shown brilliant quality in the field.

The battle-front was now gigantic, not less than 100 miles from Mesnil St. Georges to Rheims. For the remainder of the month there was a ding-dong struggle, no side gaining any real advantage, for both were near the end of their endurance. On the 11th the French retook Méry and Belloy, and advanced their line nearly two miles on a front of four between Gournay and Courcelles. Farther east they pressed back the enemy from the Matz river, and repulsed a German attack along the Ribecourt-Compiègne road. On the 12th the Germans had some success between Ribecourt and Marest, and took the latter village, as well as Chevincourt and Machemont and Melicocq. Just south of the Aisne they made another advance — two miles on a front of three. The only French gain was at Melicocq, where they won the southern bank of the Matz from Marest to the Oise. On the 13th the enemy made a great effect between Courcelles and Méry, and again between Bouresches and Belleau, but failed with heavy losses. That day Hutier's subsidiary operation may be said to have closed, and closed without any serious gain. He had squandered twenty odd divisions, and the fresh reserves left to Prince Rupprecht were again no more than twenty. The tide of assault in the West was slowly ebbing.

Having failed on his right flank, the Crown Prince made a final effort on his left. On 18th June Fritz von Below attacked at Rheims on a front of ten miles, between Vrigny, on the south-west, and the fort of La Pompelle, on the south-east of the city. He hoped to take Rheims, but he underrated the defence, and used only three divisions. The place was a vital road junction for the Allies, and, though encircled on three sides, Mazillier's 1st Colonial Corps had resisted there most stoutly during the battle, much aided by the fact that the Allies held the great *massif* of the Montagne de Rheims to the south and south-west. Below's attempt was futile, but the fiasco impressed the German Staff with the necessity of a serious effort against the Montagne if they were to make any headway beyond the Marne. Of this impression we shall presently see the fruits.

For the better part of a month silence fell on the battle-front, broken only by local attacks of the French and British, which in every case were successful, for the enemy was holding most of his front thinly with indifferent troops. He was preparing another

THE LASSIGNY BATTLE.

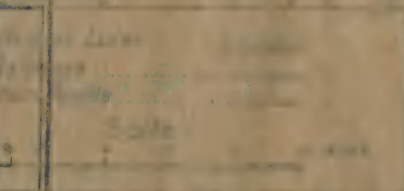
(Facing p. 260.)







THE LASSIGNY RIVER  
(Scale 1:50,000)



blow, as all the omens indicated, and it was likely that this blow would be his last. It was certain that it would be on a great scale, and would be delivered with desperate resolution, for the summer days were slipping by, and Germany waited the fulfilment of Ludendorff's pledge. So far, in three great actions, he had strategically failed. He had taken heavy toll of the Allies; but he had himself suffered colossally, and his casualties were now mounting fast to the limit which he had named as the price of victory. The climax of the battle — and of the war — was approaching, and Foch faced it with an easier mind; for he saw his army growing daily as the Americans came into line, and he could now spend more lavishly, since he was sure of his ultimate reserves. More important still, he had solved the problem of how to meet the new German tactics, and was ready with a method of his own in which this great master of modern war borrowed from his opponents, and glorified and transformed the borrowings.

Meantime, Austria had shot her bolt in Italy. We turn now to the interlude on the Piave.

## II

In the great Western offensive Austria had somewhat wryly accepted a part, and a conference at Bozen in February had settled the details. She had been promised German help; but when April passed and left Ludendorff far from his goal, the promise vanished into limbo. She must do her work herself, and the more embarrassed the German position became, the more urgent were the demands on her to fulfil her bargain. All winter and spring her prospects had been darkening. A moral and economic anæmia was sapping her strength. She had never had any true national unity, and the separatist aspirations of her subject peoples had been waxing as the central authority waned. Large sections of her population were starving; there were frequent mutinies among Czech and Slovene regiments; and their discontent was increased as news came of their kinsmen fighting on the Allied side in Italy and Russia. Desertions both at the front and on the march had become daily occurrences. The propaganda work of the Allies was producing a real effect, and discipline could only be preserved by extra doles of rations. Nor was the situation better inside the Government itself. There was growing friction with Germany, and Vienna was at variance alike with Budapest and Berlin. Not

all the Austrian generals were disposed to accept meekly the orders of the German Staff, or to take Ludendorff at the valuation placed on him by his own people. In every branch of war equipment save one Austria was to seek, and that one was numbers. She was now able to concentrate her whole army against Italy, and her units were brought up to strength by drafts of returning prisoners from Russia.

Her one hope sprang from the memory of Caporetto. The Italian fighting strength was underestimated, and the invincibility of the new German tactics overrated. The Austrian Staff believed that by following the German plan of the 21st of March they could break the Italians as they had broken them in the previous autumn. What part such a victory would play in the general scheme they did not consider, but at any rate it would give them an immediate advantage, for they would have the plundering of the Lombard plain. Austria could not sit still; she had to find food or face revolution. The corn of Italy was the bribe held out to her armies, and among themselves her soldiers called the coming campaign the "hunger offensive."

We have seen how by the end of January Pecori-Giraldi and de Robilant had restored the position on both sides of the Brenta. During the winter the work of defence had proceeded at fever heat. The rocks of Grappa and Pasubio were tunnelled with vast galleries; a new road, 17 kilometres long and climbing to 8,000 feet, was built in nine weeks to secure the Asiago front; huge entrenched camps were formed in the rear of the armies; and a multitude of successive trench lines were spread like a net over the Venetian plain. Caporetto had made the Italian Command think rather of defence than of attack, and they had actually prepared roads in case of a further retreat. At first an offensive was proposed for the spring, but in March four French and two British divisions returned to the Western front, and presently the Italian 2nd Corps had to be lent to France, so it was resolved to leave the first step to the enemy. There was little activity during the early spring except local raids; but on 27th May the extreme Italian left fought a brilliant little action in the region of the Tonale Pass, where there was news of an enemy concentration. The great offensive was expected towards the close of that month, and Italy was ready to receive it. The spirit of her troops was excellent, and the continual desertions from the enemy front inspired them with a new confidence. Diaz had nearly an equality of numbers with his opponents, and he believed that he had an answer prepared to



the tactics of Ludendorff. The old weakness of Italy's defence was still present — the fact that she must fight in an ugly salient with her left flank perpetually turned. But he had taken precautions to make that left flank impregnable.

On the long front Diaz had disposed his armies as follows:— On the western side of the Trentino salient from the Stelvio to Lake Garda lay the Seventh Army, under Tassoni. On the eastern side was Pecori-Giraldi's First Army from Garda to Sculazzone, and on its right, covering the Asiago plateau, the Sixth Army under Montuori, including the British 14th Corps, under Lord Cavan \* (which had been moved thither from the Montello in March), and the French 12th Corps. In the Grappa region lay Giardino, who had succeeded de Robilant in the command of the Fourth Army. Pennella, with the new Eighth Army (formerly the Second), held the upper Piave and the Montello, and on his right the Duke of Aosta's Third Army extended along the river line to the sea. One army, the Ninth (formerly the Fifth), under Morrone, was held in reserve under General Headquarters. Diaz disposed of fifty-six divisions between the Stelvio and the sea.

The Austrian dispositions had varied little from those of the winter. Scheuchensteuel's XI. Army was astride the Brenta, with, on its right, Krobatin's X. Army, mainly composed of German-speaking troops, and the two formed the group of Conrad von Hoetzendorff. Along the Piave were the VI. Army of the Archduke Joseph and the V. Army of Wurm, containing picked Hungarian divisions and forming the group of Boroévitch. The strategical plan selected was the only one possible, since fate had given Austria such an advantage of position. Her main object must be to push down from the hills to the plain, cut the communications of the Piave front, and turn the flank of every Italian corps between Monte Grappa and the sea. Could this be achieved, absolute victory would be hers. Subsidiary to this main operation, an attack was arranged on the whole length of the Piave line, where the new infiltration tactics were to be put in practice. The strategical conception of this attack seems to have been a general "feeling" of the whole of that section of the Italian front in order to discover its weak spots; but special emphasis was to be laid on the forcing of its two pivots — on the Montello and on the coast. "The Italians cannot be strong at all parts," ran a captured letter. "If we attack everywhere we shall discover their soft places."

\* Lord Cavan had replaced Sir Herbert Plumer in the command of the British forces on 10th March.

It is clear that the plan was badly co-ordinated, and that Ludendorff's principles were imperfectly understood. There was perpetual friction between Hoetzendorff and Boroevitch, the two group commanders; and this made it necessary to divide the available reserves between them at the start, since they would certainly quarrel over the use of any reserves kept under the Supreme Command. Boroevitch, moreover, deprecated the attack from the hills, and would have preferred to look for success to the frontal Piave attack, where he intended the battle to be a faithful copy of that of the 21st of March. The question of reserves was the weak point among the many shining advantages of the Austrian geographical position; for, while the Asiago section was served by a good lateral line, there was no direct communication between it and other parts of the front, and the battle was likely to fall into two self-contained areas.

The German tactics were slavishly imitated, but their true meaning was scarcely grasped by the Austrian Staff. In March Ludendorff had effected a local surprise. The imminence of his attack was known, but till the very hour when it was delivered its exact area was uncertain. Austria attempted the same thing; she brought up divisions of assault the day before, and only put them in line the morning of the battle; but owing to the constant trickle of deserters her attempt at secrecy proved futile. Again, Ludendorff attacked with overwhelming superiority of numbers between Arras and the Oise. Austria had fifty-nine divisions in Italy at the time, and another eleven were on the road; but she did not use much more than half her available forces the first day. This was as it should be; but instead of concentrating on one sector, she distributed her attack more or less evenly along the whole front. She sent in seventy regiments on a front of seventy-five miles, weakening most grievously her power of assault by this crazy dissipation. Again, Ludendorff had his special troops trained to the highest pitch for their task, and a perfect co-ordination between his infantry and his guns. The Austrian infantry had never had this specialized training, and the competence of their artillery had greatly declined. Finally, Austria subordinated her new tactics to no serious strategical plan, or, rather, after the first day she jettisoned the plan she had set out with, and forewent the immense strategic advantage which she derived from her position. She had more than 7,000 guns in support, she had sufficient numbers, she had the main appurtenances of modern war, but she seemed to lack the trained military intelligence. She apishly

copied the German plan of battle, but in her ignorance left out the things which gave it value, like an amateur who designs a clock but omits the mainspring.

A week before the battle opened the spirit of Italy was encouraged by a brilliant adventure at sea. On the night of 8th June two motor boats were cruising off the Dalmatian coast, one under a young Sicilian, Commander Rizzo, and the other in the charge of Midshipman Aonzo. At 3.15 on the morning of the 9th they perceived a column of smoke, and presently caught sight of two Austrian dreadnoughts, escorted by ten destroyers. The two Italians conceived the audacious idea of attacking. Rizzo slipped through the screen of the destroyers in spite of their fire, got within 400 feet of the leading battleship, and hit her with two torpedoes. Aonzo meantime succeeded in hitting the second ship. The two tiny craft then ran for home, and managed to elude the destroyer which tried to ram them. In a day or two the Austrians admitted the loss of their battleship *Szent Istvan*, and it is certain that at least one destroyer and the other dreadnought were either sunk or hopelessly crippled. The success of these two intrepid sailors, who attempted the impossible and performed the incredible, put an end for all practical purposes to the Austrian battle fleet.

On Thursday, the 13th, a curious incident happened on the extreme left of the Italian front. The Austrians attacked the Italian position at the Tonale Pass, north-west of Lake Garda, advancing against the ridges on both sides of the main road. The attack was made in some strength, and at first won a footing in the advanced lines; but it was soon repelled, and a second attack north of the road failed utterly, with the loss of some two hundred prisoners. Perhaps the business was meant as a feint; but if so, it was clumsily managed and deceived nobody. The Tonale region was too well defended by nature to be suitable for a large-scale offensive. Already Diaz had complete knowledge of the enemy's plans, even to the hour of assault. He was aware of the magnitude of the Austrian objective; for von Arz hoped on the first day to win Treviso and the southern rim of the heights overlooking the Lombard plains; and in less than a week looked to have Verona and Venice.

Diaz had news that the Austrian bombardment would begin at 3 a.m. on the morning of Saturday, the 15th. He resolved to anticipate it, and accordingly soon after midnight the Italian batteries opened on the Asiago plateau and east of the Brenta.



At half-past two this bombardment was resumed, and seriously upset the mechanism of the enemy's assembly. Punctually at 3 a.m. the Austrian "preparation" began on the whole front between the Astico and the sea. Then came four hours of intense fire, and the German plan was followed of using gas shells to search out the Italian back areas. The weather had been unsettled for some days, and a wet mist lay along the Piave and in the mountains. Between 6.30 and 7 the Austrian infantry advanced, principally in two areas — in the plains on the twenty-five mile line between San Dona di Piave and the Montello, and in the hills on the eighteen miles between Monte Grappa and Canove.

The two sections may be taken separately, for they were distinct battles, without any tactical intercommunication. The line in the hills was held by the Italian Sixth Army west of the Brenta, and the Fourth Army to the east of it. The former area was the more critical, and was made the object of Hoetzendorff's main attack. In line on the Asiago plateau, from left to right, lay the Italian 12th Division, the British 48th (South Midland) Division, the British 23rd Division, and the French 23rd Division. The chief thrust came against the British left, south of Asiago, where a breach offered the easiest way to the plain. It was delivered by four Austrian divisions, which represented a concentration of some eight bayonets to the yard. At the first shock the 48th Division was pressed back to the extent of 1,000 yards on a front of 3,000.\* The Italian 12th Division on the left, and the British 23rd on the right, being less heavily attacked, held their ground, and placed their reserves at the disposal of the 48th. That division, however, was in no serious danger. It found security in a series of carefully constructed switches, where it took its stand and pinned down the enemy's advance to an awkward pocket. Farther east the French 23rd Division stood its ground, though a few first-line positions were occupied in the Monte di Val Bella region. East of the Brenta, Giardino's Fourth Army was not seriously endangered. At one moment the Austrians reached the Col Moschin, on the very edge of the hills, but were driven off it. The obvious point of peril was the salient in which the Italian line was thrust forward on Monte Solarolo, but there all the Austrian efforts were unsuccessful.

By the evening of the 15th Hoetzendorff had most signally failed. His attack, made with a great weight of artillery and

\* The reason seems to have been that, following the new practice of keeping all the men possible out of the bombardment, its front was too thinly held.

substantial numbers, had been unable to gain anything except a few first-line trenches, which the Allied troops were already winning back. He had still a mass of unused reserves, and he was fighting in an area in which every half-mile was of value, for if he could break into the Brenta valley at Valstagna he might yet turn the vital curtain of the hills. Diaz expected a further thrust and prepared for it, but beyond doubt the honours of the first day were not with the enemy.

Boroevitch had better fortune on the Piave. The hinge of the whole Italian position there was the hill called the Montello, which lay roughly at the angle between the north and north-eastern fronts, where the Piave leaves the hill country for the plain of Venetia. The Montello is an isolated ridge, 700 feet high, and more than seven miles long, with the river running under its northern and eastern slopes. It is checkered with roads, and covered thickly with little farms and copses. Just south of it lay Nervesa, with a good crossing. If the enemy could occupy and hold the Montello, he would have turned the Italian line to the south, and would also control the passage in the gap of Vidor to the north.

The Piave was full, but not in flood, and Boroevitch thrust at all the main crossings — at Nervesa; at Fagare, in front of Treviso, where the railway runs to Udine; and in the south around San Dona, where the coastal line crosses. At all he had some success. The Archduke Joseph got across at Nervesa, and seized the eastern end of the Montello. In spite of Diaz's early and full information as to the enemy's plans, he had only one division there to meet the attack of six Austrian. Small bridgeheads on the western bank were established at Saletto and Fagare, and between Fossalta and Capo Sile. Wurm, with the old army of the Isonzo, passed the river on a front of nearly nine miles, and began to overrun the angle between the Piave and the Sile Canal.\* For a moment it seemed that the infiltration was about to succeed. But the Italian reply was speedy. Counter-attacks caught the Austrian shock troops while deploying for advance; villages changed hands many times in a few hours; and Wurm had anything but an easy passage. Yet by the close of the day, while the battle in the north had failed, Boroevitch had it to his credit that he had won a footing on the Montello, and had bitten deep into the Italian right flank. The two pillars of the defence on the Piave were imperilled.

On Sunday, the 16th, the battle in the mountains turned most

\* A small section of the western bank in this area had been in Austrian hands since the preceding November.

clearly against Hoetzendorff. The British 48th Division drove the enemy out of the pocket he had won, and by nine o'clock in the morning had recovered its old lines. It found the Austrians in complete disorder, and, along with the 23rd Division, entered the enemy front, taking guns and prisoners. That evening Lord Cavan had in his hands over a thousand prisoners, seventy-two machine guns, and seven mountain guns. On the British right the French, and on the French right the Italian Fourth Army counter-attacked, and recovered most of the little they had lost on the previous day. That evening saw the end of the mountain battle. Its first stroke had failed with grievous losses, and the enemy was unable to repeat it. The mind of General Headquarters, as we know from Boroévitch, was confused and undecided, and they were not ready to fling their weight into the area of either the hills or the river. The result was disastrous, for Boroévitch's success on the one hand was not supported, and on the other hand they sacrificed the immense strategic possibilities of an attack from the hills—the one trump card which Austria possessed. They suffered, too, from the self-contained nature of the two battle-grounds, for reserves could only get from one to the other by a long circuit.

But for a day or two Boroévitch enjoyed an illusory success. His men, including the best Hungarian regiments and a number of Slav troops, fought far better than Hoetzendorff's group. On Monday, the 17th, the Archduke Joseph extended his hold on the Montello, the Italian line now running from Casa Serena to just north of Giavera, which meant the loss of the north-eastern half of the *massif*. Lower down, between Folina and the bend of the river at Zenson, the Austrians won a bridgehead about a kilometre deep on the right bank. South of that they were across the river, and close on the Italian second line. Altogether, between Folina and the Sile Canal, they held to a depth of from one to eight kilometres eighteen miles of the western bank; they had established fourteen new bridges between the Montello and Capo Sile, and were repairing the old road and railway bridges; and they had already the better part of seven divisions across. Boroévitch was working to turn Diaz's two flanks by the capture of the whole of the Montello, and by an advance from the position he had won west of San Dona. That evening the Italians attempted a counter-stroke on their right, between Ronche and Capo Sile, but had no success, and had to content themselves with holding the line of the Palombo Canal.



It was no small achievement, and had Boroévitch been able to profit by the situation he might have won a real, even a decisive, success. But he failed to bring up the reserves which alone could have established his gains, while Diaz made no mistake about his. On the night of the 17th the Archduke Joseph made a vigorous attempt to drive the Italians off the southern edge of the Montello at Giavera, but failed; and by the morning of Tuesday, the 18th, Diaz's reinforcements were arriving, and beginning to establish the front. The position now was that Boroévitch had close on 100,000 men across the river, holding the centre thinly, but massed in force at the two flanks—the Montello and the San Dona triangle. His aim was to push these two flanks forward while maintaining his centre; it was the object of Diaz to break and turn these flanks, while at the same time piercing the Austrian centre. That afternoon a thing happened which was of incalculable value to the Italian cause.

This was the flooding of the Piave. The rain in the hills during the past days had turned the broad, shallow river into a formidable torrent. Far up in the mountain glens woodcutters had built piles of felled trees by the river-banks, waiting for such time as they could be floated down to their lowland market. Now the flood seized them and bore them like battering-rams on its yeasty current. Most of the new bridges were swept away. Only in the far south at San Dona, where the stream is always broad and deep, did bridges still stand, but instead of fourteen there were presently but four.

On the 18th the Italian counter-attack began. The Eighth Army advanced on the Montello, where the Archduke Joseph from the ridge above Ciano was already looking down on Montebelluna. It was only a beginning, but farther south the Duke of Aosta's Third Army had a real success. It broke through the Austrian centre between Candelu and Fagare, and occupied the river bank at Saletto. It reached the bank also at Zenson, and cleared much ground in the angle between the Sile Canal and the Piave, establishing itself along the Fossalta Canal. Next day, Wednesday, the 19th, the advance on the Montello was pressed strongly, and the Archduke Joseph was slowly driven back to the north-eastern corner. There was a relentless pressure, too, in the angle between the Piave and Sile, and by the 20th Wurm had lost more than half his gains, and was back within two miles of the river. Up to that day thirty-five Austrian divisions had been used in the battle. Boroévitch claimed 30,000 prisoners and 120 guns. Diaz

had already taken 13,000 prisoners. The great offensive had clearly failed; it remained to be seen whether it would not end in an Austrian disaster.

With the bridges down there was no hope for the Montello advance, and the only chance which was left to Boroévitch was to turn the Italian right at San Dona, where his communications were still more or less intact. Diaz anticipated this move by turning the Austrian left. On Friday, the 21st, a mixed force of soldiers and sailors, which had crossed the Sile Canal the day before, made their way through the shore marshes and seized a position on the eastern bank of the channel of the Piave Vecchio, about Cavazuccherina. This threatened the main stream of the Piave at Grisolera, and might turn the bridgehead at San Dona and the whole Austrian position between Capo Sile and Fossalta. Wurm grew nervous, the more so as that day he had launched an attack from the San Dona bridgehead, and had suffered a heavy defeat in front of Losson. Besides, his communications were becoming precarious, and those of the centre and of the Montello army had ceased to exist. Boroévitch could get no assistance from Hoetzendorff, he could not even get instructions from General Headquarters, and as with waning forces he was facing a waxing enemy he had no choice but to discontinue the battle. On Saturday, the 22nd, he gave orders for a general withdrawal across the Piave. The weather was improving, the stream was falling, and the best he could look for was to escape without catastrophe. That night the retreat began.

Early on the morning of Sunday, the 23rd, Diaz was made aware of the enemy's doings. He ordered a cautious general advance, and that day issued his bold *communiqué*: "From the Montello to the sea the enemy, defeated and pursued by our brave troops, is crossing the Piave in disorder." The last two words were the expression rather of a hope than of the facts. The Austrians in their retreat were faced with every difficulty — beaten troops, few bridges, a river still high; but they made their escape as skilfully as in the November before the Duke of Aosta had won away from the Isonzo, and with substantially fewer losses. By noon on the Sunday the whole of the Montello was in Italian hands, and the enemy, partly by ferry boats and partly by wading, was straggling across the Piave. Pennella at once established bridgeheads on the eastern bank at Falze and opposite Nervesa and sent forward cavalry patrols. The Duke of Aosta had a less simple task. He drove in the Austrian centre with ease, but was met



## THE BATTLE OF THE PIAVE.

(Facing p. 270.)



This is a detailed topographical map of the region around Tashkent, Uzbekistan. The map shows the city of Tashkent, the Tashkent Dam, and the Tashkent Reservoir. The map is oriented with North at the top. Key features include the city of Tashkent, the Tashkent Dam, and the Tashkent Reservoir. The map is labeled with various geographical names in Cyrillic and Latin script.

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with a determined resistance from Polish troops at the bridge of San Dona, which, except for that of Grisolera, was the only one now left. As soon as he had reached the river bank he flung bridges over, and sent forward cavalry and infantry patrols; but the enemy was now established in the old defences from which he had started the battle.

By the afternoon of Monday, the 24th, the whole of the west bank of the Piave above the Sile Canal was in Italian hands. Boroevitch had lost some 6,000 prisoners and sixty guns in the actual crossing, which was a small price to pay, considering that at the moment of retreat he had sixteen infantry and two cavalry divisions on the right bank. That day there was a slight Italian advance in the hills in the neighbourhood of Monte di Val Bella and Monte Asolone. Till the end of the month there was continuous fighting in the Piave delta, half-way between the two branches of the river. Monte di Val Bella was captured on the 29th, the Col del Rosso on the 30th, and on 2nd July the old line was practically restored in the Monte Grappa region. On this last date the Third Army finally cleared the Piave delta, and held the right bank of the main channel all the way from San Dona to the sea at Corbellazzo. We may take this as the final incident in the operations. Everything that had been lost in the attack of 15th June had been won back — everything and a little more. Venice and its great arsenal had been put out of the range of the longest of the enemy pieces.

The result of the battle was that Austria had lost some 20,000 prisoners and from seventy to one hundred guns, and had incurred at least 150,000 casualties. Her ambitious effort had utterly failed, and her offensive power was for the time at an end. Her spirit was crippled, and the hope of food which had been held out as a bribe to her starving peoples was gone. More than ever was Germany left to continue the struggle alone. The temper of Italy grew high, for Caporetto had been avenged. It had been a creditable achievement, though at times on the Montello mistakes had been made, and the harassing of the enemy's retreat had been conspicuously less skilful than the defence. Lord Cavan, convinced from his experience in the hills that the enemy *moral* was breaking, urged an immediate offensive, and it is as certain as such things can be that a blow struck with the whole of Italy's might would then and there have brought Austria to her knees. But once Boroevitch was east of the river, Diaz considered that his immediate chance had departed, and that a great Italian counter-

stroke was impossible at the moment. An attack in the mountains, owing to the difficult country, needed slow and methodical preparation, and an advance beyond the Piave, even if sufficient troops and guns had been available, would have been a hazardous adventure, since it would have further lengthened the Italian line, and would have made its precarious left flank the more vulnerable. For these reasons Diaz decided that the time was not yet for such an enterprise. In the meantime he had parried and heavily countered the last blow of Germany's main ally, and caused Ludendorff to gather all his strength for that culminating effort in the West for which Foch had made subtle and assiduous preparation.

#### IV

A defensive need not be stagnant and supine. It may be as vigilant and aggressive as any attack. From 21st March to the middle of July the mind of Foch was working intensely on the problem before him. He had to repel from day to day Ludendorff's hordes, and conserve and nurse his own mass of manœuvre; but he had also to discover the answer to the new German tactics, and frame his own tactical plan against the day of *revanche*. Hints of his solution appeared in the June fighting on the Matz and in the Italian resistance on the Piave, and by midsummer his scheme was complete. The gist of his tactical reply lay in three points: first, the organization of his outpost line in great depth, not unlike Armin's device at Third Ypres, so that the first enemy shock might spend itself in the void; second, a highly complex use of artillery to break up a concentration once it was located; and, third, a system of rapid counter-attacks to check 'infiltration' at the start. That was for the defence. For his own advance, when the time for it came, he had recast Ludendorff's tactics in a better form, and had subordinated them to a strategical plan of far greater boldness and ingenuity than anything as yet originated by the German General Staff. For these tactics he had a weapon of supreme value in his new light tanks, which, modelled on the British "whippet," were now appearing in large quantities on the French front, and which, in local counter-attacks on the Aisne, had already proved their merit.

But no plan is effective without numbers to execute it, and for the first time Foch had numbers at his command. The achievements of America in war finance, in ship construction, and in production of *matériel* were adequate to the seriousness of her purpose,



and there could be no higher praise. Already her levies of men had passed the two million point, and their preliminary training had been expedited to such a degree that soon after midsummer she was landing in France every five weeks as many troops as the sum of Germany's annual recruitment. The retreat from St. Quentin had been for the Allies a blessing in disguise, for it had induced America to perform one of the most miraculous exploits in history. In April 117,212 American soldiers had landed in Europe; in May, 224,345; in June, 276,372; and of the total of 617,929 more than half had been carried in British ships.\* The rate was increasing, too, with every week. In March the American army in France had numbered some 300,000 men; in eight months it was to grow to over two millions. Moreover, America had shown the most admirable generosity and good sense in the use made of her forces. She naturally looked forward to great American armies in France commanded, like the French and the British, by her own generals. But in order to facilitate training it was desirable to postpone the realization of this ideal, and she consented to brigade her men with French and British troops. The American divisional unit † was maintained, but it served for the present under French or British army and corps commanders. For a month or two it was inevitable that the number of American troops capable of being used in the first line should be only a small proportion of the total in France. But the presence of these great potential reserves had the inestimable advantage that it enabled Foch to use his seasoned troops boldly, since material for replacing them was mounting up every day.

It is hard to tell how far Germany was aware of the full danger awaiting her in this addition to the Allied strength; but whatever her General Staff may have thought, her politicians and her press gave no sign that they realized its gravity. Sneers at America were the stock-in-trade of every German newspaper and most German orators. The nation was officially informed that every day saw anti-war demonstrations in New York, and that the weeping and desperate conscripts had to be herded on board the transports by special police. The great American army, said the press, could not swim or fly, therefore it would never arrive; the Americans only shouted to keep warm, and would bring everything to

\* From March 1918 to the end of the war the proportion was: American vessels, 42.15 per cent.; British vessels, 55.40 per cent.; the remainder being provided by France and Italy.

† An American division numbered 979 officers and 27,080 men.

market except their own skins; the bravos of the West were no better than Falstaff's men in buckram; only the wastrel and the degenerate ever enlisted in the American ranks — such are a few phrases culled from writers of established reputation. The financiers told the people that it was fortunate that America had entered the war, since she was the only country from which a big indemnity could be extracted. Even in July the boasting continued. One German journal during that month declared that the American millions would be found to be only "soldiers of a child's game, mostly made of paper cuttings;" and on the 4th the *Deutsche Tageszeitung* wrote: "To-day, on the anniversary of the American Day of Independence, the Entente will fill the world with sounding praises of this help. America herself will produce a world of bluff in the shape of phrases, threats, and assertions — all bluff, pure bluff, celebrated in Paris by a review."

Ludendorff was an experienced soldier, and less easily deceived. But he considered that he had still a chance of winning the victory which he had promised his people. He had waited six weeks, partly because of the influenza epidemic and partly from the sheer necessity of resting certain overworked units — the same time as had elapsed between the Battle of the Lys and the Third Battle of the Aisne — and he had collected every reserve from every front on which there were German troops. He had brought a new army, the IX., under von Eben,\* from the East, to act as an "army of pursuit" when the Allied front was broken. His plan was to strike out from the awkward salient in which Boehn had been entrapped, and to press beyond the Marne and cut the great lateral railway from Paris to Nancy. At the same time Mudra (who had succeeded Fritz von Below) with the I. Army, and Einem with the III. Army, were to strike east of Rheims between Prunay and the Argonne, for he wanted the railway system that ran through that city. If these operations succeeded, Rheims and the Montagne de Rheims would fall, and the French front would be divided into two parts which would never again be joined. Then, sweeping westward, with the help of Eben, Boehn would march on Paris down the valley of the Marne. Foch would hurry up his scanty reserves — Ludendorff believed that they were all but exhausted, and that the Americans were too untrained to be dangerous — to the threatened point, and at that moment Armin would attack at Ypres, and Hutier and Marwitz would break through the Amiens-Montdidier front and descend on the capital from the north. Then

\* He was succeeded on the 9th of August by von Carlowitz.

would Haig be finally cut off from Pétain, and Pétain would be broken in two, and victory, complete and cataclysmic, would follow. The Germans christened the coming battle the *Friedensturm*, the action which would bring about a "German peace."

The enemy was so confident that he made little secret of his plans. From deserters and prisoners Foch gathered the main details long before the assault was launched. His problem was not an easy one, for he had vital objectives, like Paris and the Nancy railway, far too near his front. It was not likely that Boehn could advance far unless he broadened his salient; but the attack of Mudra and Einem east of Rheims was a grave matter, for, if they succeeded, all the difficulties of the salient would vanish, and the disadvantage of position would lie wholly with the French. He resolved to meet the shock as best he could, and at the right moment to use every atom of reserve strength to strike at the enemy's nerve centre, as a wary boxer, when his antagonist has overreached himself, aims at the "mark." It was a bold decision, for he followed Montrose's maxim, and "put it to the touch to win or lose it all." If he failed it would be hard to save Paris. But if he succeeded? To a watcher of the auspices the German front on the map wore a look of fortunate omen, for it had that shape of a sickle, with the handle in Champagne and the centre of the blade on the Ourcq, which it had borne on the crucial day of September 9, 1914. That day Foch had struck and shattered the first German dream; now, after four years, he played for the same tremendous stake among the same hills and forests.

The Allied Commander-in-Chief had planned on a majestic scale a battle of the Napoleonic type. All the cherished stages of the great Emperor were provided for. The advance guard would take the first shock, make clear the enemy's intention, and pin him down to a definite field of action. Next, at the right moment, a blow would be delivered at the enemy's weakest flank. Last would come the thrust against the now embarrassed centre, and whatever the gods might send thereafter in the way of fortune. To carry out this scheme it was essential that the Germans should not repeat their performance at the Third Battle of the Aisne, and drive back the French too far. Some retirement was inevitable, but it must be calculated and defined. In Boehn's area it would be all to the good that the apex of the German salient should extend well south of the Marne till it became as deep as it was broad; it would only make the conditions better for the next stage. But the gateposts must stand, and at all costs the salient



must not be widened. The critical area was east of Rheims. There the enemy must be held in the battle positions, for if he pressed too far he would render Rheims and the Montagne untenable, and instead of an ugly salient would create a broad arc curving securely into Champagne.

Between Dormans, on the Marne, and Rheims Foch had the Fifth Army, under Berthelot, who had for nearly two years been chief of the Allied Mission in Rumania. With Berthelot at the Montagne de Rheims was the Italian 2nd Corps, containing picked Alpini battalions. On his left, from Dormans to Faverolles, lay the Sixth Army, under Degoutte, who, in April 1917, had commanded the Moroccan Divisions at Moronvillers. Between Faverolles and Soissons lay the Tenth Army, under Mangin. Mangin, it will be remembered, had been the hero of the winter battles at Verdun in 1916, and had commanded the Sixth Army at the Second Battle of the Aisne. After that for many months he had been lost in obscure commands; but now he was to vindicate his claim to rank among the foremost Allied generals. East of Rheims, holding the gate of Champagne, was the Fourth Army, under Gouraud. With him was the 42nd American Division (General Menoher), known as the "Rainbow," since it was drawn from many States. With Degoutte was the 3rd (General Dickman), the 26th (General Clarence Edwards), the 28th (General Muir), and the 4th (General Cameron) American Divisions, and with Mangin the 2nd (General Harbord) and 1st (General Summerall). By the middle of July there were on the Marne over 300,000 American soldiers in line or in immediate support.

Ludendorff, seeking a final decision, did not unduly limit his objectives. He wanted no less than the line of the Marne between Epernay and Châlons as the fruit of the first day's advance. The attack was arranged in two sections — on a front of twenty-seven miles, between Fossoy, south-east of Château-Thierry, and Vigny; and on a front of twenty-six miles east of Rheims, between Prunay and the Main de Massiges. In each area he used fifteen divisions for the first wave, twenty-three of them fresh divisions from his general reserve, and seven of them borrowed from Prince Rupprecht's group. He had a large number of tanks, which he allotted to the area east of Rheims, where the low downs of Champagne made the going easier for machines which had not the skill of the Allied type in covering rough country.

At midnight on Sunday, 14th July, Paris was awakened by

the sound of great guns. At first she thought it was an air raid, but the blaze in the eastern sky showed that business was afoot on the battlefield. She waited for news with a solemn mind, for she knew that the last stage of the struggle for her possession had begun. The "preparation" lasted till four o'clock; but before the dawn broke the Germans were aware of a new feature in the bombardment. The French guns were replying, and with amazing skill were searching out their batteries and assembly trenches, so that when zero hour came the attacking infantry in many parts of the line were already disorganized. Foch's intelligence service had done its work; he had profited by the enemy's bravado, and he read their plans like an open book.

About 4 a.m. on the 15th, just at dawn, the German infantry crossed the parapets. Bochn was instantly successful, for it was no part of Foch's plan to resist too doggedly at the apex of the salient. The Germans passed the Marne at various points between Château-Thierry and Dormans, reached the crest of the hills on the south shore, and extended to the valley where lay the villages of St. Agnan and La Chapelle. It was an advance of from one to three miles on a front of twenty-two. That evening Boehn's line lay from Fossoy, south of the Marne and three miles east of Château-Thierry, by Mezy, St. Agnan, La Chapelle, Comblizy, north of Mareuil le Port, through Chatillon, north of Belval, through Cuitron and Clairizet to the Bois de Vrigny. It was a substantial advance; but one thing it had failed to achieve. It had not widened the salient. No impression had been made upon the French front in the Montagne de Rheims region, and the gatepost on the west at Château-Thierry stood like a strong tower. In the former area the Italian 2nd Corps, fighting among thick woods in the upper glen of the Ardre, barred the way to Epernay by the Nanteuil-Hautvillers road. In the latter area the American 3rd Division\* and elements of the 28th first checked and then rolled back the German wave, clearing part of the south bank of the river, and taking 600 prisoners. These were the troops who, according to the German belief, would not land in Europe unless they could swim like fishes or fly like birds. Like the doubting noble of Samaria, the enemy had declared, "If the Lord would make windows in heaven, might this thing be." But the inconceivable had been brought to pass. Birnam Wood had come to Dunsinane.

\* On the front of the 3rd Division the Germans had 84 batteries — 336 guns, as against 31 American and French batteries — 124 guns.

East of Rheims Mudra and Einem made no headway at all. They were opposed by one who was not only a paladin of chivalry, but a great and wily tactician. Gouraud's counter-bombardment dislocated the German attack before it began; his deep outpost zone caused it to spend itself idly with heavy losses; his swift counter-attacks checked the infiltration before it could be set going. Ground was, indeed, given up north of Souain and Prosnes, and between Tahure and Massiges on the old Champagne battlefield, and the Germans entered Prunay. But not a French gun was lost, and Gouraud's battle zone was untouched. The German tanks were all stopped by anti-tank guns or land mines. The French losses were trifling: only 3,000 men passed that day through Gouraud's casualty stations. It was indeed for the enemy such a situation as had faced Nivelles at the end of the first day of the Second Battle of the Aisne. But the failure was far graver for Ludendorff, for he was staking all on an immediate victory.

Nevertheless the end was not yet. The Germans had still at least sixty divisions in reserve, and they were battling for dear life. The unsuccess of the first day must be redeemed, and at any cost Epernay must be reached and the Montagne isolated. Could this be done, there was still time to form a new front on the western flank and push down the Marne to Paris. The French south of the river in the St. Agnan valley had lost their power of direct observation, and so could not use their guns effectively against the German bridges. The danger point was the road to Epernay up the Marne Valley, and all day on the 16th Berthelot was hotly engaged. He fell back 4,000 yards, but in the evening his centre was still holding on the line Festigny-Belval. Farther west the French had better fortune, for in the afternoon they counter-attacked between Comblizy and St. Agnan, won the ridge overlooking the Marne, and proceeded to make havoc among the German pontoons. In Champagne that day there was no advance. Mudra and Einem were utterly exhausted. On the fringes of the Montagne the French and Italian troops on Berthelot's right maintained their positions. The day closed with ill omens for the enemy. Since the French on the St. Agnan ridge could sweep the river crossings, it would be hard for Boehn to maintain his eight divisions beyond the river.

Yet on Wednesday, the 17th, he still persisted. There was hard fighting on Berthelot's right wing, where the Italian 2nd Corps was engaged on the upper Ardre, and the Germans made progress at the Bois de Courton and towards Nanteuil. The



THE SECOND BATTLE OF THE MARNE.  
(Facing p. 278.)



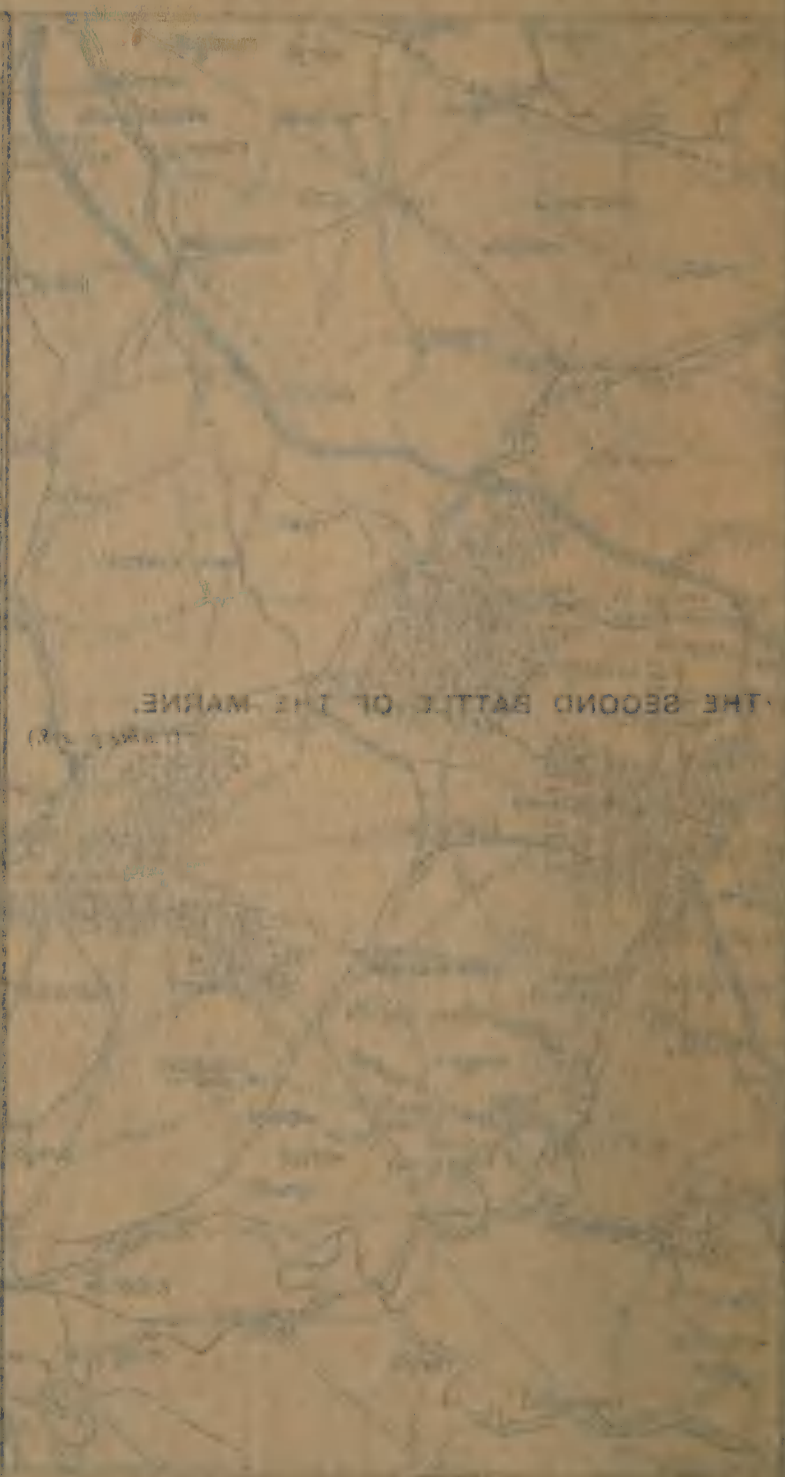
Map of the Second Battle of the Marne (1918)

Labels on the left margin (top to bottom):

- Ypres
- Arras
- Amiens
- Compiègne
- Paris
- Reims
- Verdun
- Meuse
- Marne
- Seine
- Loire

THE SECOND BATTLE OF THE MARNE.

(1918)



Italians, however, by a brilliant counter-attack retook the village of Clairizet. South of the Marne the French centre was pressed farther up the river; but by the evening it had retaken Montvoisin and the high ground to the west between that place and Festigny. Boehn made a great effort to win back the ridge just south of the Marne, but failed; and all day the battle swung backwards and forwards without material result. But by the evening the eight German divisions were very weary, and their communications across the river were in serious jeopardy. They had shot their bolt, and at the farthest point had advanced some six miles from their old battle-front.

The time had now come for Foch's counter-stroke. He had resolved to thrust with all his available reserves against the weak enemy flank between Soissons and Château-Thierry. It offered a superb mark. In the first place, Boehn was fighting with his head turned the wrong way, and in case of a flank attack must make hasty and difficult adjustments. In the second place, the German communications were parallel to their front. The great road from Soissons by Fère-en-Tardenois to Rheims, with its branches running south to the Marne, was the main feeder of the whole German line in the salient. If that were cut anywhere north of Rozoy supply would be greatly hampered. Moreover, all the railway communications between the salient and the north depended upon the junction of Soissons. If that junction were captured or rendered unusable, the Marne front would suddenly find itself some thirty miles from a railhead. It is inconceivable that the German Staff should not have been alive to such a risk, and the only explanation is that they believed that Foch had no serious reinforcements. At the moment, between Soissons and Château-Thierry, Boehn had only eight divisions in line and six in support; but he had large reserves inside the salient, and the new IX. Army, under Eben, was forming in the rear for its advance on Paris.

When Foch decided to stake everything on his attack, he took one of those risks without which no great victory was ever won. Prince Rupprecht had still his twenty-two fresh divisions threatening Flanders and the Amiens gate, and more than one French commander viewed the hazard with grave perturbation. There were anxious consultations between Foch, Pétain, and Fayolle. But the general most intimately concerned, Sir Douglas Haig, had no doubts. He was prepared to weaken his own line rather than cripple Foch's great bid for a decision, and willingly con-



sented to the withdrawal of the eight French divisions from Flanders. More, with the assent of his Government, he placed four British divisions unreservedly at Foch's disposal for use with Mangin or Berthelot. It was a courageous decision alike for Cabinet and Commander-in-Chief, for so far Foch had been frequently proved in error, and his record was still only of withdrawals and defeats.

Ever since, on 16th June, he had succeeded to the command of the Tenth Army, Mangin had been engaged in preparing a jumping-off ground for his assault. By many local attacks he had worked his way out of the gully between Ambleny and St. Pierre Aigle, and, farther south, had reached the east bank of the Savières. He wanted to be clear of the forest and the ravines, and to have a starting-point on the edge of the plateau. From Longpont there runs eastward from the forest for twenty miles a high and narrow ridge, culminating in the heights north of Grand Rozoy. This gave him an avenue for his advance, for if he could win its eastern end he would command not only the vale of the Ourcq, but the whole plateau eastward towards the Vesle. By the morning of Thursday, the 18th, there had been a readjustment of the French forces. Mangin's Tenth Army, which was to conduct the main operations, was in its old place between the Aisne and Faverolles, on the Savières; but Degoutte's Sixth Army, which had been holding the line from Faverolles to St. Agnan, drew in its right to Vaux, a mile west of Château-Thierry, and the gap between it and Berthelot was filled by the French reserve army, the Ninth, under de Mitry.

Mangin's striking force was assembled during the 17th in the shade of the Villers-Cotterets forest. The morning of the 18th dawned, after a night of thunderstorms and furious winds. There was no gun fired on the northern section, but at 4.30 out from the shelter of the woods came a swarm of 321 tanks; and behind them, on a front of thirty-five miles, Mangin's army and Degoutte's left and centre crossed the parapets. The tactics of Cambrai had been faithfully followed. From Fontenoy, on the Aisne, to Belleau, six miles north-west of Château-Thierry, was the front of action, and before the puzzled enemy could realize his danger the French and Americans were through his first defences.

The advance of the 18th was like a great bound forwards. Mangin's left wing swept through the villages of Pernant and Mercin, and by half-past ten in the morning held the crown of the Montagne de Paris, half a league from the streets of Soissons,

and within two miles of the vital railway junction. Farther south, his centre — the American 1st and 2nd Divisions and between them the 1st Moroccans — occupied half the plateau which separated them from the Crise valley and the great Soissons-Château-Thierry road; and that night the village of Vierzy fell. Degoutte by the evening held the front Chouy-Neuilly St. Front, and thence by Priez and Courchamps to Belleau, though an enemy salient remained about Noroy-sur-Ourcq. The American 26th Division was the southern pivot at Vaux, while the line advanced and took Torcy and Belleau. Sixteen thousand prisoners fell to the French, and some fifty guns; and at one point Mangin had advanced as much as eight miles — the longest advance as yet made in one day by the Allies in the West. Foch had narrowed the German salient, crumpled its western flank, and destroyed its communications. He had wrested the initiative from the enemy, and brought the *Friedensturm* to a dismal close.

He had done more, though at the time no eye could pierce the future and read the full implications of his victory. Moments of high crisis slip past unnoticed; it is only the historian in later years who can point to a half-hour in a crowded day and say that then was decided the fate of a cause or a people. As the wounded trickled back through the tossing woods of Villers-Cotterets, spectators noted a strange exaltation in their faces. When the news reached Paris the city breathed a relief which was scarcely justified with the enemy still so strongly posted at her gates. But the instinct was right. The decisive blow had been struck. Foch was still far from his Appomattox, but he had won his Gettysburg. He had paralyzed the nerve-centre of the enemy, and driven him down the first stage of the road to defeat. When the Allies breasted the Montagne de Paris and the Vierzy plateau on that July morning, they had, without knowing it, won the Second Battle of the Marne, and with it the war. Four months earlier Ludendorff had stood as the apparent dictator of Europe; four months later he and his master were in exile.

## CHAPTER XCVI

### THE FOURTH YEAR OF WAR: A RETROSPECT

*June 28, 1917—June 28, 1918*

Behaviour of British People after March Crisis — The Maurice debate — The Submarine — Understanding with America — The position in Eastern Europe — The Bolshevik Nightmare — Murder of the Imperial Family — Allies' Attempt to Restore Eastern Front — Murman and Archangel — Siberia — The Russian Volunteer Army — Transcaucasia — Friction between Turkey and Germany — Dunsterville at Baku — Feeling in Germany — Resignation of Kuhlmann — The First Overtures for Peace.

IF we make the anniversary of the beginning of war the day of the Serajevo murders, we have to look back upon a year of nearly continuous Allied misfortunes. If we take it as 4th August, the date of the real start of hostilities, we can discern the first flush of the dawn of victory. It had been a twelvemonth of supreme tension and grave searching of heart. The Allies had seen Eastern Europe fall into the grasp of the Central Powers. They had seen a German domination established over a nerveless Russia which it might well take a century to unloose. They had found their whole scheme of battle ineffective in the West. Costly partial victories had succeeded each other until the pendulum swung backwards, and in a week those partial successes had been turned into something not far from disaster. There was a time in April when men who were honest with themselves were compelled to admit that what seemed a little before to be the last stage of the war had been but the prelude to an indefinable campaign which stretched darkly into the future — unless, indeed, the Allies were to acknowledge defeat.

The crisis called out the noblest qualities of the Allied Powers, and that in itself was a guarantee of victory. But the foundations of popular thought had been shaken, and till the turn of the tide in July there were few willing to prophesy and none to dogmatize.



An air of expectation was abroad, for though reason seemed to point to a protracted campaign, the instinct of mankind argued otherwise. This was true of all the belligerents alike. The German people spoke of peace in the autumn—peace on their own terms; the Allied peoples, while preparing for years of further campaigning, had a sense that these preparations would not be called for. All wars are fought under a time limit determined by human endurance, and there was an instinct abroad that that limit was not far off. There was a feeling in the air of a climax approaching. The skies were dim and tenebrous, but behind the clouds men felt that there was light—either apocalyptic fires or the glow of a beneficent dawn.

Our object in the present chapter is first to assess the mood in which the nations, while the end seemed yet afar off, yet waited instinctively for its speedy advent. In the second place, we must pick up the tangled threads in the East. Towards the end of a long struggle destiny seems to select one area in which the ultimate battle is waged. This in truth had always been the West. From 21st March onward the wildest of military dreamers, whose fancies had hitherto ranged throughout the globe, admitted that there the final lists had been set. But the confusion in the East could not be without its effect on the Western campaign, for it must attract to itself not only the troops and guns of the Allies, but much of the time and thought of the Allied leaders. Again, Germany had so mortgaged her assets in the East that what did not help her to victory there would beyond doubt hasten her progress to defeat. If Russia proved a handicap instead of an aid, if Bulgaria and Turkey fell out of the contest, it would go far worse with her than if she had never sent a man beyond the Vistula and the Danube. Finally, there could be no universal peace until the Eastern tangle was unravelled, and on the situation left there at the close of war depended the ease or the difficulty of the reconstructive task laid upon the civilized world.

In analyzing the popular mood it will be well to select two types of the belligerents—Britain and Germany. France and Italy were invaded, and were, so to speak, in the battle-line. Their intimate peril subordinated all other questions to the urgent one of defence, and, though they had their malcontents and doctrinaires, the strong discipline of self-protection held them quiescent. America was like a young man girding on his armour for battle. Her spirit was that of Europe in 1914; she had not yet felt the sad satiety of war, she was absorbed in earnest preparation, and

President Wilson, after the crisis of March, had abandoned his exploration of the fundamentals of policy for the more urgent task of stimulating and directing the effort of his countrymen. Among the Central Powers, Bulgaria was tired and apathetic; Turkey broken by suffering out of the semblance of a nation; and Austria flaccid with hunger and internal dissolution. Germany had always been the centre of the ill-assorted confederacy, and now she was more than ever its sole support. If we understand her mood we shall understand the policy of the Central Powers. Britain, too, was a mirror for the Allies. Her freedom from invasion gave her a certain detachment; yet she was not less deeply concerned in the war than Italy or France, for her safety, nay, her existence, depended upon victory. We can see in the free expression of her popular opinion the exact reflection not only of the Allies' moods, but of their many and varied ideals and policies.

## I

The catastrophe of March had, as we have seen, roused to a high pitch the courage and resolution of every class of the British people. It was like the case of a runner who, when far advanced in a race, gets his "second wind." But a second wind does not mean that fatigue has gone, or that the limbs are as vigorous as at the start. The months between March and August 1918 were for Britain the most critical in the war, and made extreme demand on her stability and fortitude. Below the splendid renaissance of the early spring there lay a great weariness. Behind her stout front there were strained nerves and tired minds. Effort had ceased to be joy, and had become a grim duty — a dangerous phase for the enemy, had he understood it, for Britain has never been so formidable as when she has been heart-sick of a business. She wore down Philip of Spain and Louis XIV. and Napoleon because she continued to fight when she would have given anything for peace — anything except her soul. The strain was shown in gusty minor strifes which blew up like desert sandstorms. An instance was the Maurice affair in May. Sir Frederick Maurice, the Director of Military Operations at the War Office, published on 7th May a letter in the newspapers, in which he flatly contradicted certain statements made by the Prime Minister as to the strength of the British front before the attack of 21st March. The letter was intended to provoke a parliamentary inquiry; but Mr. Lloyd

George had no difficulty in providing in the House of Commons a kind of answer to its statements, and, after a curiously inept defence of General Maurice by Mr. Asquith, made the matter a question of confidence in the Government, and secured a large majority. The vote given in the Maurice debate became a test of loyalty to the Prime Minister — a preposterous result, for General Maurice's indictment was almost literally accurate, and Mr. Lloyd George's defence, which was not without cogency, should have been based on other foundations than the denial of indubitable facts. The whole controversy was a jumble of half-truths. Many soldiers were justifiably irritated with the Government; the Government, on the other hand, had a right to claim a tolerant judgment in their supreme difficulties; but the affair showed how thin had worn the sheathing on the nerves of large classes in Britain.

It was the same with Labour. The unselfish co-operation of March and April began to show rifts so soon as the worst danger was past. It would have been a miracle if it had been otherwise, for the working-man was as weary as other people. In July things came to a head in a serious dispute among munition workers and a threat of a general strike, which was averted by the prompt action of the Government. More serious still was the strike of the London police in the beginning of August, when men serving under discipline extorted from the Government concessions which, whether right or wrong on the merits, should never have been granted to what was in effect a mutiny. British Labour has one enduring characteristic: it is patriotically united in the face of a grave peril, as happened in March; it is united, as after August, when victory is dawning; but in periods of stagnation it grows restless and self-conscious — a pathological state and not a reasoned policy and a condition which it shared with classes which had not its excuse.

Of pacificism in the common sense of the word there was little, for Britain does not talk of peace when things are going ill with her. A certain type of shallow intellectual hankered after negotiations with the enemy; read miracles of moderation into every evasive sentence of Czernin or Kuhlmann; and denied the possibility of a decision in the field. But he found only a scanty audience. The ordinary man, with a truer wisdom, saw that the Allies must win decisively in battle or acknowledge an unqualified defeat. He was not distracted by the enthusiasts who preached a League of Nations while they refused to lay its foundations, or dreamed of an *Internationale* when the foes of internationalism



were still at large, or who in their folly conceived that the canker of civilization could be cured by laying the axe of Bolshevism to the tree. The common sense of the country was accurately expressed in a letter which Lord Hugh Cecil published on 15th August: — "The war must be fought till it end in the submission of Germany. By submission I do not in the least mean destruction. . . . We do not seek to destroy Germany, but we seek to force Germans to recognize that they have been defeated, and to submit to the authority of a world stronger than they. . . . And submission cannot be attained by negotiations such as are now suggested to us. Negotiation at the present time might lead to an agreement as between equals, but not to the submission of a defeated nation to superior power. And until that submission is made it is idle to hope that the German Government will turn from the false gods it worships. I dare say there are wise and good Germans who hate the system of blood and iron. But they have no power, and will have none so long as that system maintains its repute. Our business is not to suffer it to save its credit, but to make its failure plain according to its own standards. Moloch must be humiliated in the sight of all his votaries if they are to accept a purer faith."

On one matter during the spring and summer the mind of the British people was becoming more at ease. The submarine had been Germany's most trusted weapon, and while its violence continued unabated a profound uneasiness filled the land, which no success of our armies could allay. It was fortunate that the darkest hour in France should synchronize with a real mitigation of this peril. In the early months of 1918 there were many naval losses. The liner *Tuscania*, carrying American troops, was torpedoed off the Irish coast on the night of 5th February; the hospital ship *Glenart Castle* was sunk in the Bristol Channel on the morning of 26th February; in June U-boats were raiding small craft off the New Jersey and Delaware coasts; on 20th July the large White Star liner *Justicia* was lost after a stout fight in Irish waters. As yet, too, British shipbuilding was not keeping pace with the losses, for in the first quarter of 1918 there was still a large adverse balance against us. But by midsummer our output was steadily growing and our losses steadily shrinking, while the progress of the United States in production was advancing by leaps and bounds. Meantime, the British Navy by countless ways was at length coming to its own. On 7th August the Prime Minister told the House of Commons that that Navy was, at the outbreak

of war, the largest in the world, with a tonnage of two and a half millions, that now it was eight millions, and that, as a proof of its activity, in June it had steamed eight million miles. He added that 150 German submarines had already been destroyed, more than half in the course of the past year, and on 6th September the Admiralty, in proof, published the names of their commanding officers.

Another fact made at this time for optimism in the British temper. This was the growing understanding with America. The contact with her soldiers in France, the contact with the many thousand Americans who came to these islands on war duties, and the appreciation of America's superb activity, combined to create a real warmth of feeling towards the other great branch of the English-speaking people. The Fourth of July, America's Independence Day, was celebrated throughout Britain as a popular festival; for it is her illogical fashion, after a deserved defeat, to join with the victors in acclaiming the justice of their triumph. Mr. Wilson, indeed, enjoyed at the time in these islands a popular repute higher than he possessed in his own land. In the eyes of many he had clarified the issues of the war, and so saved it from developing into a blind contest of force, and the tactless autocracy of some of his methods was not within the cognizance of his British admirers. In Mr. Walter Page, too, America had an ambassador who in the highest qualities of a plenipotentiary was not excelled by any of his brilliant predecessors. His shrewd, kindly wisdom had in the past three years smoothed away many difficulties and the charm of his strong and sincere and most generous spirit did more to reveal his country to Britain than a decade of propaganda.

## II

Before we turn to Germany it is desirable to review the situation in the East during the spring and summer of 1918. It is, indeed, obligatory, for thither Germany looked for the material gains of which her victory in the West would give her quiet possession; and as difficulties thickened in that quarter the loss of this hope was to play a major part in that breakdown of her "home front" which attended her breakdown in the field.

By the end of March the Eastern Allied line, which a year before had been continuous from the Baltic to the Persian Gulf, had largely disappeared. It is unnecessary in these pages to record

in detail the mutations of each section — from the Baltic to the Bukovina, from the Bukovina to the Danube mouths, from the Black Sea to the Tigris. Suffice it to say that the Russian wing had been destroyed, the right centre in Rumania put out of action, the left centre in the Caucasus reduced to chaos, and General Marshall in Mesopotamia left to fight his battles without the support of allies, and no longer a partner in a continuous front. The result was that Finland had become an independent state and an ally of Germany's; Germany was advancing between the Baltic and the Black Sea as she pleased; the Caucasus was torn with internal dissensions, and the Turks were pushing eastward towards the Caspian and southward into Persia; while throughout Transcaspia and Siberia combinations of Bolsheviks and Austro-German prisoners were following their own sweet will; and the British in Mesopotamia had not only the enemy to the north of them, but had on their right flank a distracted Persia, which at any moment might become an enemy Power under Turkish and German officers. It was a situation which none of the Allies, least of all Britain, could afford to neglect. A German Finland would give the Central Powers control of the bridge between the Baltic and the Arctic seas. Unless help came, Russian nationalism would be crushed under the twin weights of Bolshevism and Teutonism. The gap of the Caspian offered to the enemy a highway into Central Asia, where already he had his outposts. The turning of the Persian flank not only placed Marshall in a position of great danger, but threatened to put a match to the inflammable stuff around the Indian border.

There were, indeed, encouraging elements in the problem. The Murman coast and Archangel were open to our ships, and there we might form a bridgehead on which the Russian nationalist forces in the north could be based. The Czecho-Slovaks lay along the line of the middle Volga, though cut off from the north by a solid wedge of Bolshevism. In the Don and Kuban provinces east of the Sea of Azov the Cossacks and the nationalists were strong. In the Caucasus the Allies had many potential friends who might, with a little help from outside, prevent the Turks from making their way to the Caspian. The Czecho-Slovaks were at Vladivostok and also in western Siberia, though the country between was in Bolshevik hands. In Mesopotamia Marshall had little to fear from an attack down the Tigris, and might be able to detach troops to keep Persia quiet, hold the south shore of the Caspian, and even defend Baku from the Turks. Allenby in Pales-



tine was secure, and at any moment might begin to exercise a pressure which would distract the Turk from his Caucasian adventure. There were elements of hope, too, in connection with the internal politics of Turkey and Bulgaria, but for the present we may confine our attention to the military aspect of the situation.

The plain task of the Allies was to reconstitute the Eastern front. It was a thankless, almost hopeless task, but by every law of policy and strategy it had to be attempted. For success it was necessary to occupy the Murman coast to keep guard on Finland; to land troops at Archangel and push south from that bridgehead to join hands with the Czecho-Slovaks on the Volga; to assist by some means or other Alexeiev and Denikin to continue the Czecho-Slovak left wing to the Caspian; to intervene in east Siberia, so as to control with the help of the Czecho-Slovaks the whole Trans-Siberian railway, and provide communications for supplying the front on the Volga; to send troops to Transcaspia to hold the enemy there in check; to assist the Armenians and Georgians to resist the Turk in the Caucasus; and to continue the line of defence from the Caspian through north Persia till it met Marshall's front in Mesopotamia. Such was the ideal towards which the Allied staffs laboured. All of it was common sense and sound policy; much of it was impracticable, considering the limited numbers at their command and their intense preoccupation in the West. A more difficult problem, perhaps, never confronted an alliance, and it was not made simpler by a certain divergence of political views among the Allied Governments. To build up the Eastern front with the few divisions spared with difficulty from other battlefields might well have seemed as impossible as to stem the Atlantic with a broom. Yet the attempt was gallantly made; and if it failed to achieve a lasting success, it yet helped to check the enemy's main ambition, and to strip him of his most confident hope. Let us take the long front from north to south, and consider in turn the position in European Russia, Siberia, the Caucasus, Persia, and Mesopotamia.

The record of the doings of the Bolsheviks immediately after the Treaty of Brest Litovsk was partly tragedy and partly *opéra bouffe*. It was tragic because of the hideous sufferings of Russia, and comic from the failure alike of the Bolshevik tyranny and its German exploiters. During April and May Trotski sulked and raved in his tent, threatened vengeance against Germany, half-persuaded the Allies that he and his friends represented an undying hostility to German aims, and made abortive efforts to raise a

Red Army to defy the invaders. But presently came the menace of the Czecho-Slovaks, which Germany was forced to treat with respect. She made a bargain with Lenin, undertaking not to advance farther east than a certain line from the Gulf of Finland to the Black Sea, so that Trotski's new Red Army would be able to give undivided attention to the danger on the Volga. But she found that she had stumbled on a hornet's nest. In no part of her new sphere of activity did things go well during the summer. In Finland, which she regarded as now her own preserve, and proposed to endow with a German kinglet, Red Guards and White Guards continued their struggle; and when the former were beaten, there came the threat of the British from Murman. In Russia itself there seemed no substance hard enough for her steel to bite upon. Trotski was now, where Germany was concerned, sufficiently tame; but his writ ran in narrow bounds, and he was faced everywhere with hatred, conspiracy, and anarchy. The honest elements in Russia were struggling to draw together, struggling for the most part in vain, for they were widely scattered, and had few leaders; but their efforts gravely impeded the German machine. For the stiff German soldiers and the supple German diplomats it was like building on sand; the foundations were sucked in before the first stones could be laid of the superstructure. A Bolshevik ambassador was sent to Berlin; a German ambassador, Count Mirbach, was dispatched to Moscow; but on 7th July Count Mirbach was assassinated, and his successor, Helfferich, paid a hurried visit and then departed from so insalubrious a habitation. The most that Germany could do was to lend troops to stiffen the Red Army now disputing with the Czecho-Slovaks on the Volga.

In the Ukraine she made a disastrous blunder. She showed too openly her hand, and methodically set about plundering the place of supplies. She obtained enough to tide over the worst of the shortage in Austria, but presently the supply stopped, for the peasants rose in revolt, and everywhere there were murders and guerilla war, culminating in the assassination of Field-Marshal von Eichhorn, formerly of the X. Army, on 30th July, in the streets of Kiev. The Ukraine had become a German province under a *hetman*, General Skoropadski, who was nominated by Berlin; conscription had been decreed; the peasants had been forced to return property taken from the landlords the previous autumn, and compelled to cultivate their land for the benefit of Germany. The result was a *jacquerie* and universal resistance,

and the effect was felt over the whole of Russia. Had Germany handled the matter with discretion she might have won a great triumph; for the moderate parties in Russia had lost most of their ideals and sought only peace, and even men like Miliukov inclined to favour the German faction because it promised a relief from anarchy. But Germany's treatment of the Ukraine had been too barefaced to leave any doubt as to her policy. She had entered Russia to bring not peace but fetters, and the spectacle convinced the bulk of the people that the German cure for Bolshevism was little better than the disease.

As for Lenin and Trotski, they had now sold themselves to their masters, and provided proof of what Kerenski in June told the British Labour Conference, that "the actions of the Bolsheviks made them the vanguard of triumphant German militarism." The actual leadership was in the hands of Lenin, who had greater nerve and a steadier balance than the other, and knew more precisely what he wanted. He cared nothing for the dismemberment of Russia; he did not seek peace; he welcomed destruction, for only by the road of universal destruction could the world reach that communism of which he dreamed. The advent of the Czecho-Slovaks and the imminence of Allied intervention brought the wildest spirits to the front, and what had formerly been a class tyranny became also a class vendetta and an orgy of brigandage and murder. A commission\* sat in permanent session to check counter-revolutionary activities, and this became a secret tribunal whose findings none dared question, which did to death innocent men and women in hundreds of thousands, and which was served by a Red Secret Police, more cruel and bloodstained than even the Okhrana of the Tsardom.

To this last body, rather than to Lenin, is to be attributed the hideous fate of the Imperial household. Till August 1917 the Emperor and his family had been under guard at Tsarskoe Selo, and were then removed by Kerenski's orders to Tobolsk, in Siberia, for greater security in the uncertainty of the political situation.

There they lived in comparative peace and comfort, the health of the Tsarevitch slowly getting worse, till in April 1918 they were removed to the Urals, and imprisoned in the house of a notary in Ekaterinburg. There is reason to believe that had Nicholas been willing to sign the Treaty of Brest Litovsk he might have been

\* The *Tchrezvychaika* (popularly called the *Tcheka*), or "Extraordinary Commission for combating Counter-revolution." This and the *Tsik*, or Central Executive Committee, made up the chief mechanism of Bolshevik administration.



restored to the throne by Germany and her agents, who then dominated the Bolshevik *Tsik*. He was true to his honour, and he and his household were accordingly left to the tender mercies of the Jews of the *Tsik* and the Red Secret Police. These latter knew that the Tsardom was still too powerful a sentiment in the Russian people for any open punishment of the Imperial family, so they resorted to midnight killing. A Jew, Sverdlov, seems to have been the chief agent of the deed at headquarters in Moscow, and another Jew, Yurovski, the actual murderer. On the night of 16th July the Emperor and Empress, their son and daughters, and a few attendants — eleven persons in all — were taken to a little room in the basement of the Ekaterinburg house, and there were pistolled by Yurovski and his Magyar accomplices, and their bodies burned in a pit in the neighbouring woods. The end of the Romanovs had not the dignity of the fall of the Bourbons. Secretly, sordidly, they were done to death in the wilds by ruffians and madmen, and the world heard only by accident of their fate. For the sick boy, for the poor broken-hearted princesses, for the distraught Empress, and for the gentle, weary Emperor it was a happy release: —

“He hates him much  
That would upon the rack of this tough world  
Stretch him out longer.”

But the horror and squalor of the tragedy showed the depth to which once proud Russia had fallen.

From that date the rule of the Bolsheviks lost all semblance of decency. A handful of armed bandits, backed up by Lettish and Chinese mercenaries, did what they pleased with the relics of the State and the lives of the people. The cities of Russia fell into the condition which Dr. Johnson has described — “the streets full of soldiers accustomed to plunder, and the garrets of scribblers accustomed to lie.” During August, in Moscow and Petrograd, Allied officials and residents were arrested wholesale, and suffered every indignity and privation. But their sufferings were nothing to what was endured by unfortunate Russians who incurred the suspicion of the *Tcheka*. Armed bands of miscreants paraded the streets “smelling out” suspects like African witch-doctors. On 31st August Captain Cromie, the British naval attaché, who as submarine commander had won the Cross of St. George, was murdered in the British Embassy at Petrograd. After that, terror was unloosed, mainly in Petrograd, where Zinoviev, the president of the Soviet, desired to rival the fame of Hébert.

Priests, officers, officials, merchants, and employers perished in scores daily. A certain Uritski, appointed a special commissioner to "combat the counter-revolution," called upon his men to shoot down any suspected of bourgeois sentiments. He won the name of the "new Marat," and, like Marat, perished at the hand of a Charlotte Corday. Lenin, too, was seriously wounded, and these efforts at retribution fanned the fury of the tyrants. At Uritski's funeral Zinoviev declared that a thousand bourgeois lives must pay for any such attempt. On 1st September the official organ of the Red Army announced: "We will make our hearts cruel, hard, and immovable, so that no mercy will enter them, and so that they will not grieve at the sight of a sea of enemy blood. We will let loose the floodgates of that sea. Without mercy, without sparing, we will kill our enemies. For the blood of Lenin and Uritski, Zinoviev and Volodarski, let there be floods of the blood of the bourgeois — more blood, and ever more blood."

Amid this carnival of devilry Lenin found time, on 6th September, to sign three further treaties with Germany, giving security for the satisfaction of her claims. The Baltic Provinces, whose liberty had once been dear to Trotski's heart, were to have their frontiers defined as Germany pleased; Baku and its oil region were made a German preserve; and for her gracious permission to the Bolsheviks to remain in a truncated Russia an immediate payment was to be made of £50,000,000 in goods and £300,000,000 in gold. This from a bankrupt land throughout which industry was at a standstill and famine was stalking! In part it was policy, the policy of those who are convinced that they must destroy before they can build. This is the defence put forward by those who find certain rags of virtue in Lenin — that he was single-hearted in his passionate communism, and that he had the courage to face the means implied in the end which he had set himself. But it is a defence which breaks down; for the day was to come when, after reducing the country to a sty and a desert, he was to recant his principles and plead for the revival of capitalism in order to continue in power, and was thus to earn, in addition to the world's abhorrence, the world's contempt. But in large part it was madness, the madness of men released from all discipline, and hot to avenge their vanity on whatever in the past had thwarted them, whatever reproved because of its beauty or greatness or long descent. In all their mania, too, there was a strain of despair, as of those who knew that their time was short and had forgotten all else in their lust for destruction. It recalled

the amazing debate of the Committee of Public Safety early on the morning of September 3, 1793, when the death of Marie Antoinette was decreed, and Hébert opened his heart. "I cannot see clearly when it is night. I cannot see roses where there are only daggers. I know not whether there remains to you any hope of the Republic or the Constitution, or of the safety of your persons; but I know this, that if you have any you are greatly deceived. We shall all perish. It cannot be otherwise. . . . We live for nothing but vengeance, and that may be immense. In perishing let us leave to our enemies the germs of their own death, and in France so great a destruction that the memory of it will never die."

From June onward the Bolsheviks were recognized as the declared foes of the Allies. But to bring help to the Russian nationalists and the Czecho-Slovaks seemed a wellnigh impossible task, for all inlets to Russia were closed save by way of the Arctic and the Pacific. The Allied policy of intervention was based on two incontrovertible facts — that the Bolsheviks were open partisans of Germany, and that the Allies were bound in honour to assist the Czecho-Slovaks and those Russian elements who were maintaining the front against the common enemy. They desired scrupulously to avoid any interference with Russia's internal policy — even with Bolshevism, except in so far as it acted as Germany's agent. Especially they did not wish to antagonize the soviets, where these represented the will of the people. But it was obviously a most delicate task, since many Russians who were honestly anti-German held also fiercely partisan views on domestic policy, and opposition to Germany was scarcely a link sufficiently strong in itself to keep monarchists, bourgeois, and all the varieties of socialist working in harmony. The Allies were certain to be drawn into situations where they might seem to be taking sides in Russia's private disputes. The position was not made easier by the fact that many among the Allied peoples were strongly opposed to armed intervention: some holding that it was the same kind of blunder as Britain had made in the early wars of the French Revolution, and would only strengthen Bolshevism; others that it was a military error to dissipate resources when every man was wanted in the West; others, who had the support of the American Government, that the only wise kind of intervention was economic and philanthropic, forgetting that a trade circular and even baskets of food are poor comfort to a man if the knife of the enemy be at his throat. These difficulties made it



likely that, though the case for armed assistance was unanswerable, that assistance would be given slowly and feebly. This was in fact what happened. The Allies escaped no one of the disadvantages of intervention, and, because their forces were too few, they did not reap the fruits. Let us recount briefly the main stages.

In February and March 1918 the British effected a naval landing at Murman, at the head of the Kola inlet, the terminus of the new railway to Petrograd, and at Pechenga, a hundred miles farther west, the nearest Russian port to the Finnish frontier. There was no serious opposition, and soon the arrival of French and American cruisers made the occupation international. The local soviet worked harmoniously with the Allies, and the landing was, in fact, approved of by Trotski. Then came the German alliance with Finland, who was promised the Russian territory lying between her eastern borders and the White Sea. To meet this threat Allied reinforcements arrived in June, under General Poole. Presently the Bolsheviks changed their policy, and demanded the departure of all Allied forces from Russia — a demand refused by the Murman provisional Government, who thereupon threw in their lot with the Allies. Then followed for three months attacks from the Finnish borders, which were beaten off by Allied troops and local levies, till Finland's enthusiasm for conquest waned and Germany's preoccupations elsewhere made her assistance impossible. The problem at Murman was always simple. There was little trouble with the local population, and the enemy was too remote and the country too difficult to make invasion easy. The occupation served the useful purpose of checking German intrigue in Finland and giving the Allies a bridgehead on Russian soil, but the isolation of that section of coast deprived it of strategic importance.

It was different with Archangel, which General Poole occupied on 2nd August by a surprise attack. There lay vast quantities of war material sent by the Allies to Russia, which Lenin's Government was busy commandeering and selling to the Germans; and there, too, the local Bolsheviks had imposed their crazy type of misgovernment upon a starving province. The Allies' business was to feed the people, to prevent the disposal of war stores to Germany, to establish a free Russian Government in the area, and to push southward to join hands with the right wing of the Czecho-Slovaks west of the Urals. But the troops sent were wholly inadequate for the purpose, and the military operations up the river Dvina and the Vologda railway, conducted by British, French, American, and Russian detachments, failed to effect the

desired junction. Moreover, there was endless trouble with the Russian troops and with the temporary Government — consisting of the members originally elected to the Constituent Assembly — which it was the first business of the Allies to establish. The whole Archangel affair was an example of how a wise policy can be wrecked by half-heartedness. The gallant efforts of General Poole in no way assisted the Czecho-Slovaks, and they brought little succour to the unfortunate provincials. By establishing a front astride the Dvina we cut off Archangel from her natural source of food supply, the Russian interior, and so saddled ourselves with the task of feeding the population by supplies carried over some thousands of miles of sea to a port which was ice-bound in winter. On the whole this duty was fulfilled, but a task which had been entered upon for high strategic reasons ended by becoming a mere business of commissariat.

The Siberian situation was the most hopeful, and at the same time the most perplexing. Its elements were the Czecho-Slovak forces, about 120,000 strong, some at Vladivostok, and some on the western borders of Siberia, while between them lay the railway, held in large patches by Bolsheviks and Austro-German prisoners; a number of sporadic Russian nationalist troops, some in the Far East, some at points along the line, and a considerable number, under Alexeiev, in the Don and Kuban provinces,\* but separated by a wedge of Bolsheviks from the left wing of the Czecho-Slovaks in the west; various Russian governments, springing up throughout Siberia, and often dissolving a day or two after their creation; the sympathy of the mass of the Siberian people, who desired order, and had little leaning towards the Lenin *régime*; and the Allies, toying for long with the notion of sending help through Vladivostok and finally dispatching troops, which, as at Archangel, were too few to meet the need, and were further embarrassed by the lack of a central command. Japan was willing enough to intervene in eastern Siberia, but professed no interest in the western battle-ground; while America was never fully convinced of the wisdom of the step, and encumbered such aid as she gave with rigid conditions. Out of such a tangle it would have been a miracle if there had emerged either a clear policy or vigorous action. The Czecho-Slovaks from first to last had to bear the brunt of the contest themselves. The

\* This was the Volunteer Army organized by Alexeiev and Kornilov. Its story is an amazing romance, for it began by being utterly without equipment, and it could only arm itself by defeating and plundering the enemy. Yet as long as its founders lived it never failed in an enterprise.

diplomatic *pourparlers* which continued all summer revealed the weakness of an alliance in any far-flung scheme of strategy.

On 3rd August the British contingent reached Vladivostok to find the Czecho-Slovaks hard pressed, various local governments which had to be conciliated, and various Russian leaders of *condottieri* who needed delicate handling. Two days later they had joined the Czechs on the river Ussuri, north of Vladivostok. Meantime the Czechs, under General Diterichs,\* had taken Irkutsk, and controlled most of the railway from the Volga to Lake Baikal, but without immediate Allied help they could not hope to maintain their ground. On 12th August the first part of the Japanese contingent, under General Otani, landed at Vladivostok, where French troops had preceded them; and the first Americans appeared on the 16th. The situation in eastern Siberia now began to improve. The Japanese reinforced the Ussuri front, and by the 30th the enemy was in full retreat towards Khabarovsk, while the Czechs at Lake Baikal were holding their own, and controlled all the railway east of the lake. By this time they had been formally recognized by all the Allies as a belligerent nation, and since the Czech control now extended to the Pacific, Bohemia, as in Shakespeare, had a sea coast. On 2nd September the Czechs, moving east from Baikal, joined hands with Semenov's Cossacks moving westward, while the Japanese had routed the Bolsheviks on the Amur railway. Communication was now open between Vladivostok and the Volga. On the 5th Khabarovsk fell to Otani. The enemy in Siberia had virtually collapsed, and the way was clear for the Allies to push west to the vital Volga front.

But the smallness of their numbers, their lack of unity, and the endless civil difficulties about railway control and the recognition of new-born Russian governments, made any swift action impossible. Something had been gained, for Siberia had been won back for the moment from both Bolshevik and German; but the Czechs in the west were still in desperate straits. At the beginning of September they held a line along the Volga, running from Volsk, north of Saratov, by Samara and Simbirsk, to Kazan, with a detachment on the northern line between Ekaterinburg and Perm. But their ammunition was running low, and presently they lost Volsk and Simbirsk and Kazan. They were at the most, with their Russian contingents, some 60,000 strong, and with German aid the Bolshe-

\* He was originally Chief of Staff to Radko Dmitrieff; afterwards Director of Military Operations, first on the south-western front and then at General Headquarters.



viks had against them a force of well over 100,000. The enemy had 18,000 troops between General Poole and the Czechs in the Ekaterinburg area, and a large army around Kharkov and Bielgorod to advance to the Volga and prevent a junction with Alexeiev on the Don. Moreover, out of their scanty reserves, the Czechs had to maintain garrisons in western Siberia. For tenacity and courage they had few superiors; but they were fighting a hopeless battle, and must inevitably retire towards the Urals. Yet for the moment they had preserved Siberia from anarchy, and they provided a barrier against Germany's rapid exploitation of Russia's disorders which might have otherwise malignly influenced the battle in France.

The story of Transcaucasia at this period is one of the most confused in the war, and it cannot be dissociated from the obscure happenings in Transcaspia and Central Asia, for it was to the Caucasus that Germany looked for an alley to a new Asian dominion. The Russian Revolution of March 1917 had produced a national self-consciousness throughout the country, and, under the influence of Georgia, politically the most mature of the peoples, the independence of Transcaucasia was proclaimed in November, and a general Transcaucasian Government was formed in a republic to include Georgians, Armenians, and Tartars. Meantime there was anarchy among the Russian troops of the Caucasus, and Prjevalsky, who had succeeded Yudenitch, was compelled to ask Turkey for an armistice. The advance of the Turks began to weaken the allegiance of the Tartars to the new Government, and in March 1918 came the Brest Litovsk treaty, making over Batum, Kars, and Ardahan to Turkey. These cessions were a serious blow to the Georgians, but they had no alternative except to submit. Presently Turkey increased her demands beyond the Brest clauses, and at a conference held in Batum in May the Georgian delegates refused to accept them. The Transcaucasian Government had now ceased to exist; an independent Armenian republic of Erivan was proclaimed under Turkish protection; a Tartar republic on the same terms, which included Baku, was established in Azerbaijan; and Georgia was compelled to appeal to Germany.

Turkey, it was clear, intended to deal high-handedly with Transcaucasia, and this Germany had no mind to permit. She cared little what happened to the Armenians, but she was determined to control Baku and its oil-fields, and she had selected the Georgians to be her special allies and to play the part she had cast

for the Finns in the north and the Bulgarians in the Balkans. General Kress von Kressenstein was recalled from Syria — where he was soon to be sorely needed — and sent to Tiflis; and German troops were marched into Georgia, while German trading houses endeavoured to secure every possible contract for the development of the region. An attempt was made in July to settle affairs with Turkey by a conference at Constantinople, and the Turks were categorically informed that they must abide by the Brest treaty. They paid no attention, continued their intrigues throughout the whole Caucasus, and advanced steadily on Baku. Their aim was to control the region by means of the Moslem inhabitants, and all Germany could effect was to withdraw Georgia from their influence, and to make a contract for oil with the Armenians and Bolsheviks of Baku, which would be worthless when the Turks took the town. The rift between Germany and her Moslem ally was widening.

Such is a rough sketch of the main events of six months of plot and counterplot. It was a matter in which Britain was acutely interested, for not only did it directly affect her Mesopotamian campaign, but it prejudiced the whole future of Persia and the immediate hinterland of India. Events east of the Caspian were not less disquieting. After nearly a year of contest, the Soviet of Tashkend had beaten the Provincial Government at Kokand, and overpowered all resistance between Baku and Ferghana. In May Russian Turkestan had been declared a soviet republic. These events thrust the moderates into the background, and inclined the Central Asian Moslems towards Germany and Turkey as possible deliverers from this thralldom, while Pan-Islamic and Pan-Turanian \* propaganda took on a new lease of life.

The nearest British troops were the small contingents in Persia and the army in Mesopotamia, and their problem was sufficiently complex. In the first place, the road from Bagdad to the Caspian must be kept open against the Turkish assaults from the west. In the second place, the advance of the Transcaspian Bolsheviks † must be checked. They had taken Merv, and if they had further success, they might be joined by the Turcomans, and the whole region be set ablaze. Berlin-Batum-Baku-Bokhara was a more dangerous enemy route to the Indian frontier than Berlin-Bagdad. Again, if the Eastern front was to be restored, the Caspian and its

\* Pan-Turanism was a Turkish movement for unity based upon race affiliation, and not, like Pan-Islamism, upon religion.

† The best of them were Austrian prisoners whose one object was to find a way home.

shipping must be mastered, and this meant that Baku must be held against the Turk. In August a British force was sent to Transcaspia, and after many vicissitudes succeeded in beating the Bolsheviks so soundly that they exchanged military operations for local atrocities. This remote side-show had in reality immense political importance for Britain, since the line from Merv to Kushk ended within two days' ride of Herat, the key of Afghanistan.

The defence of the Bagdad-Caspian route was maintained, in spite of the forays of Turkish cavalry from Tabriz and the ceaseless raids of the hill tribes, notably the Jangalis around Resht. But the main interest centered in Baku, where, on the night of 25th July, the Bolsheviks were overthrown and a new Government set up, which at once begged for British assistance. It had control at the moment of the shipping on the Caspian, and sent transports to Enzeli to fetch the small British force under Major-General Dunsterville,\* which was now more than 1,000 miles from its base. The main difficulty was the shipping, for the Caspian Fleet was not to be relied on. The second was the quality of the local levies — 7,500 Armenians and 3,000 Russians — who proved wholly useless in action. On the 17th August the former refused to fight, and presently went home; and a strong Turkish assault on 26th August was repulsed only by two British battalions, the North Staffords and the Worcesters. At the close of the month Dunsterville was in serious straits. The Turks, under Nuri, were round the town, and on the 31st the local troops failed once again, and the Warwicks had to cover their retirement. But meantime the Russian partisan leader, Bicharakov, who had done good work with Marshall in Mesopotamia, took Petrovsk, on the Caspian, 200 miles to the north, and sent reinforcements to Baku. These arrived on 9th September; and after further trouble with the Caspian Fleet, and a serious rearguard action on the 14th, the British evacuated Baku and reached Enzeli in safety — a result which must be considered fortunate in view of the immense risks run by the expedition. It had never been our intention to garrison Baku ourselves, but merely to assist the local Government to establish their hold on the oil-fields, and to secure the Caspian shipping. Since the local Government proved incompetent to organize resistance, there was nothing for Dunsterville to do but

\* Dunsterville was head of the Mission in northern Persia, which was largely engaged in famine relief. His headquarters at the time were at Kasvin. He had already made a reconnaissance to Enzeli in the spring of that year.



to leave the place to the Turks. It was a possession which they were not destined to enjoy for long.

The situation around the Caspian condemned General Marshall to inactivity on his main battle-ground. He found himself involved in adventures many hundred miles from his front, and, while this duty continued, he must remain inactive on the Tigris, though much could be done to restore order and prosperity to the ancient land which his predecessor had redeemed. Sir Stanley Maude, as we have seen, died on November 18, 1917. In December an attack was delivered against the Turkish 13th Corps, holding the Diala and the Jebel Hamrin passes, and on the 5th it was driven towards Kifri with heavy casualties. On the 9th Khanikin was occupied. Early in the new year Marshall resolved to advance his front on the Euphrates, and to break up the new Turkish concentration two miles north of Hit. On 8th March it was discovered that the enemy had retired fifteen miles upstream to Salahiya, and next day Hit was occupied. The Turks were still retiring, and on the 10th Marshall was in Salahiya. It was decided to try an encircling operation against the position at Khan Bagdadi, where the enemy proposed to stand. By 11.30 on the night of 26th March our cavalry had worked round his flanks and cut off his retreat; and our infantry, attacking next morning at dawn, completed his discomfiture. Major-General Sir H. T. Brooking occupied Haditha without trouble, and pursued the Turks for seventy-three miles along the Aleppo road, taking over 5,000 prisoners. In April the centre of interest moved to the Tigris, where we advanced along the Mosul road, taking Kifri on the 27th and over 1,000 prisoners, and entering Kirkuk on 7th May without opposition. Thereafter, as we have seen, came the distractions on the Caspian, and the arduous task of relief work on the Persian border; and Marshall was forced to retire his right wing. It was not till October that he struck again on the Tigris, and then he had before him a breaking enemy. Meanwhile in southern Persia Sir Percy Sykes and a small Indian contingent had been besieged in Shiraz for the better part of the summer, and by his resolute resistance succeeded in checking the spread of revolt among the tribes and reading the rebels a memorable lesson.

In reviewing these strange months we may say on the whole that for the Allies the balance leant to the credit side. They had failed, indeed, to recreate the Eastern front. At the most they had established it in patches, which left the strategical position

precarious. Poole was still far from the Czecho-Slovaks on the Volga; the latter had both their flanks turned, and, though communications were now open behind them, they had as yet received no supports or supplies; Kaledin in despair had taken his life, Kornilov had been killed by a casual shell, Alexeiev was dying, and Denikin could make little way north of the Caspian; the Turks were in Baku; Persia was still disruptive and wavering, and Marshall could not carry out his proper task for attending to her vagaries. Yet, if we compare the situation in September with that after the signature of the Brest Litovsk treaty in March, we shall see how far astray had gone Germany's forecast. She had by her conduct in the Ukraine involved herself in a mesh of troubles; hopelessly antagonized such orderly elements as remained in Russia; and got little in the way of supplies for herself. She had lost Siberia, and had seen the Czecho-Slovaks spring up like a new seed of Cadmus, to dispute with her the way to the East. She was at variance with Turkey over the Caucasus, as she was at variance with Bulgaria over the Dobrudja. She was rapidly losing Finland, the northern pillar of her Eastern ambitions. Above all, the two Prussianisms — one of which was called Bolshevism — had proved incompatible, in spite of their formal alliance. A belief in force and the tyranny of a class is insufficient as a bond of union, if the two parties differ as to the class; and a common ruthlessness is more likely to lead to quarrels than to co-operation.

Germany had played with fire, and it was about to scorch her hands. To her statesmen it was plain long before September that the policy which seemed so hopeful at Brest Litovsk had utterly failed. There was no make-weight to be found in the East against a stalemate in the West; and if disaster befell in the West, from the East assuredly could come no succour. Nay, her oriental acquisitions would be like a millstone round the neck of a sinking man. When Prince Leopold of Bavaria and his staff crossed the Vistula by the Warsaw bridge on that July day in 1915, they saw the sky reddened with the fires of great burnings, which marked the retreat of Russia into her wild spaces. It was the sight which Napoleon had seen, and it carried the same omen. Russia had retired into the wastes both of the earth and of the spirit, and the invader had followed to his destruction.

These things were beginning to be perceived by Germany's rulers. Their people had followed them blindly, and taken from them a confidence ready-made, for they had little reasoned assurance of their own. If the nerve of the leaders failed, there could

be no popular endurance. We pass now to consider the mutations of German opinion between March and September.

### III

In April Burian, who in December 1916 had been displaced by Czernin, succeeded him as Foreign Minister of the Dual Monarchy. It was one of those aimless changes of *personnel* which proved nothing except the rudderless character of Austria's statecraft. She was drifting now in an archipelago of reefs — the nationalism of her subject peoples, the truculence of Hungary, a cracking army, a starving population. Without affection or hope she continued to follow the will of her stronger partner, and, though passionately desirous of peace, she had not the energy left to initiate any independent policy. It was very clear that Austria could not secede from the war of her own will, for she had no strength in her limbs; but it was clear, too, that some day soon her limbs must collapse beneath her.

In Germany the people had been moved to a sudden hope by the promises of February and the achievements of March and April. After that the hope waned, but a conviction endured — that there must be peace before the winter. The confidence of most of her statesmen had a longer life — till well into September. There were exceptions, and the most notable was Kuhlmann, the Foreign Minister. He had never favoured the spring offensive, and by May he had convinced himself of its futility. Accordingly, on 24th June, in the Budget debate in the Reichstag, he warned his hearers that it was idle to look for a decision in the field. It was a remarkable speech, which revealed the perturbation of Germany's civilian statesmen. He admitted the failure of the Eastern policy by granting that the Brest Litovsk treaty needed revising, and by candidly stating the difficulties with Turkey. He repeated the old tale of Germany's innocence of any thought of world dominion; she sought, he said, only the boundaries drawn for her by history, sufficient overseas possessions to correspond to her greatness, and freedom of trade with all continents over a free ocean. She was willing to listen to any honest offer of peace, and trusted that her opponents would approach her with a proposal; but she would make no statement about Belgium which would bind her without binding her enemies. If one looked only to the battlefield no decision could be said to be in sight, and



he quoted Moltke very much to the purpose. Germany could not be conquered, but "in view of the enormous magnitude of this coalition war, in view of the number of Powers, including those from overseas, involved in it, an absolute end can hardly be expected through military decisions alone."

The speech was the swan-song of Kuhlmann's diplomacy, of the whole policy of the German *politiques*. It was an attempt to break to the German people the news that the promises of February could not be met, and that the boasting of the early summer had been idle. But Kuhlmann and those behind him had miscalculated the popular mood. The drop was too sudden, and the outcry was violent. The Pan-Germans assailed the Foreign Minister as a partisan of Britain; he was made to explain away his speech by an admission of the necessity of victory in the field, and the Imperial Chancellor made a further and most unflattering apology for the "accidental" indiscretions of his colleague. He found he had no supporters, for truculence had become the fashion again, and even Scheidemann bowed to it. He was made the scapegoat, too, of all the blunders of the Government, for, as von Holstein once observed to Prince Bülow: "When the sun shines the Chancellor suns himself; when it rains, it is the Foreign Secretary who gets wet." On 10th July he resigned, and was succeeded by Admiral von Hintze. He had been the exponent of the practicable, or what seemed to him the practicable, as against the megalomaniacs, and there was no place for him in a world where calculations were becoming as futile as dreams. Two days later Hertling, with the support of the Majority Socialists, declared the policy of Germany on confident lines, announcing, among other things, that she held Belgium as "a pawn for future negotiations," and thereby refusing what the Allies had always maintained to be pre-condition of any discussion of peace terms. The last German offensive was due in three days, and it was necessary to stiffen the spirit of the country.

July came to a close, and with it any confidence that remained to the High Command. During August there were signs that it was the leaders in the fields rather than the politicians who wished to mitigate the arrogance which they had aforetime fostered. Hindenburg, now somewhat of a lay figure, found himself compelled early in September to issue a manifesto against the growing movement towards compromise. He chose to explain it by the success of Allied propaganda inside Germany — propaganda which it was the fashion to decry in the countries of origin, but which the

Germans had come to regard with uneasy respect. On 12th September the Vice-Chancellor, von Payer, made a curious speech in which, while declaring that he did not believe in a peace of conquest, he expounded Germany's terms in the fashion of a conqueror. There could be no handing back of Poland or Finland or the Baltic states to Russia, or any paring down of Germany's acquisitions in the East. "We can never permit any one to meddle with us in this matter from the standpoint of the present European balance of power, or rather British predominance. Just as little will we submit to the Entente, for its gracious approval or alteration, our peace treaties with the Ukraine, Russia, or Rumania. In the East we have peace, and it remains for us peace, whether it pleases our Western neighbours or not."

These were brave words, but they were inopportune. The unhappy Government at Berlin might speak boldly one day, but the compulsion of events compelled it to change its tone on the morrow. On 14th September Germany made an offer of a separate peace to Belgium, who at once rejected it. She offered also to refrain from attacking Eastern Karelia if the Allied troops would withdraw from the Murman coast, having found it impossible to induce Finland to make any efforts to fight for the territory she had claimed. More significant still, Austria-Hungary addressed a Note to all belligerents and neutral states proposing a conference for a "non-binding confidential discussion" as to the possibility of peace. This offer, though Germany officially denied any connection with it, was undoubtedly made with her knowledge. The truth is, that Austria was desperate, and was approaching that condition when she must sue for peace on any terms. Germany was willing to permit the Note as a *ballon d'essai*; if it failed, she could save her dignity by repudiating any part in it; if it succeeded, it would give her the conference for which she had always intrigued. The reply of the Allies was instant and unequivocal, and it was that of Lucio's comrade in *Measure for Measure* — "Heaven grant us its peace, but not the King of Hungary's!" Mr. Balfour, on 16th September, asked pertinently what use would such a conference be, if the policy of the Central Powers was the policy of von Payer's speech of 12th September. That same day came America's answer: "The Government of the United States feels that there is only one reply which it can make to the suggestion of the Imperial Austro-Hungarian Government. It has repeatedly and with entire candour stated the terms on which the United States would consider peace, and can and will

entertain no proposal for a conference upon a matter concerning which it has made its position and purpose so plain."

This, then, was the state of affairs in the third week of September. The German people were in a mood of deep depression, careless of the arguments booming above their heads, but clinging blindly to the certainty of a peace of some kind before the winter. Their rulers were not less disconsolate. They saw their front in the West cracking, and the whole fabric of their power in the East beginning to crumble about their ears. They knew the terms upon which alone the Allies would think of peace, and these terms meant the downfall of all they had builded, and the reversal of Germany's policy since the days of Bismarck. They could not bring themselves as yet to bow to them, and they hoped against hope for some diversion, some gift from the gods at the eleventh hour. On 24th September both the Imperial Chancellor and the Vice-Chancellor spoke in the Reichstag, clinging to their old dogmas, but striving so to phrase them that, while maintaining their substance, they might fall more soothingly on Allied ears. It was certain that Germany would not admit defeat till her armies were decisively beaten in the field.

That decision was very near. Two days later Foch launched his final battle. We turn to that epic campaign of August and September which had prepared the stage for this, the last act of the play.



BOOK IV

THE SURRENDER



## CHAPTER XCVII

### THE TURNING OF THE TIDE

*July 18–September 24, 1918*

Foch's Strategy of the Last Battles — The Germans Driven behind the Vesle — Haig strikes on 8th August — The Battle of Amiens — Byng's Attack of 21st August — Battles of Albert and Bapaume — The Last Battle of Arras — The Capture of Péronne — Capture of Drocourt-Quéant Switch — Hindenburg Line reached — Pershing clears the St. Mihiel Salient — The Eve of the Final Effort.

THE final battle had been joined, but it must develop slowly. Let us attempt to discover what was in Foch's mind.

The Second Battle of the Marne restored to the Allies the initiative. That is to say, they had now power to impose their will upon the enemy to the extent of deciding the form and the time of an action. The enemy might attack, but his attack would be the result of Allied compulsion, and therefore foreseen and prepared for, whereas the Allied offensives would come of their own free will. During most of the campaign in the West the Allies had kept the initiative, for they won it at the First Battle of the Marne, and did not lose it till Ludendorff's advance of March 21, 1918. But the initiative of itself could not give victory, or Germany would have been victor after the latter date. For that it must be combined with a *final* superiority in effective strength; that is, one side must have increased and be able to go on increasing, while the other must have passed the summit of its power and be on the decline. To this position the Allies had never as yet attained. They had come very near to it before the close of the First Battle of the Somme, and they would have achieved it during 1917 had the Russian front held. But the defection of the East turned the tables on them, and gave Germany the initiative, and a temporary, though not a *final*, superiority in effective strength. For three months the Allies stood precariously on the defensive, while that temporary supremacy slowly vanished. Then came the hour when the balance inclined towards them, and the mistakes of



his opponents offered Foch the chance of a *coup* which gave him back the initiative. He had now in addition a *final* superiority in men and material, and had, moreover — what is not necessarily the same thing — this superiority translated into a greater number of reserve divisions. He had, therefore, the means to his hand of using to the full the advantage of the initiative, and nothing but an incredible blunder could have lost him this crowning asset.

He made no blunder, for the wisdom which had patiently stood the shock for nearly four months and bided its time was not likely to fumble when the chance for which it had striven appeared at last. To the bludgeon of Ludendorff he had opposed the lithe blade of the swordsman. He had avoided his enemy's shattering blows; he had pinked him, and had drawn much blood; he had baffled and confused and wearied him till the brute force of his antagonist was less than his own trained and elastic strength. But the time for the *coup de grâce* was not yet. In 1813 the Prussian Staff, studying the methods of Napoleon, laid down as the first principle of that great master of war the rule: "Economize forces, while keeping the battle nourished, right up to the moment when the transition is made from the preparation to the main attack." Germany had forgotten this maxim, but Foch had remembered it, and had made it the text of a homily in his *Les Principes de la Guerre*. It was now, as ever, the basis of his policy.

But this self-discipline and discretion would have been of no value unless the plan for the *coup de grâce* had been found. Such a plan Foch had prepared, and it is on this plan that his claim to pre-eminence as a leader depends. Since he became Allied Commander-in-Chief he had made many mistakes; by his slowness in reinforcing Haig he had invited a disaster on the Lys; he had been completely surprised by the German attack on the Aisne heights; in the disposition of his forces, as in the way he mixed up the British and the French armies, he had often been clumsy. But in the major business of war he did not err. He had that first quality of the superior mind, the power to select amid a welter of confused alternatives, the capacity to make a simple syllogism, which, once it is made, seems easy and inevitable, but which, before it is made, is in the power only of the greatest. No epoch-making step in history, whether in war or in statecraft, seems otherwise than inevitable in the retrospect. It is like great poetry, compounded into something immortal out of the simplest ingredients by the alchemy of genius.

All former Allied offensives had, after a shorter or longer time,

come to a halt for the same reason — wearied troops were met by fresh enemy reserves. The battle became, as it were, stereotyped; the enemy was able to perfect his defence; and the action ended in stalemate. Even after further success was impossible, there was a tendency in the attacker to continue hammering at an unbreakable front, because he had set the stage for action in that one area and could not easily shift his batteries and communications elsewhere. In a word, the offensive lacked mobility, and was apt to end in a needless waste of men. This trait was as notable in the Allied attacks on the Somme, at Arras, and at Passchendaele, as in the futile German attempts at Verdun. The first problem was, therefore, to get a superior mobility in the attacks, and to bring in the element of surprise. This the Germans achieved at St. Quentin by the use of storm battalions and the method of 'infiltration'; but they did not grasp the logical consequences of their new system of war. They allowed an action which was based essentially on surprise to drift into a stationary battle. They permitted their army to become *accroché*, alike on the Somme, on the Lys, and on the Marne; and therefore, sooner or later, they were faced by Allied reserves and brought to a standstill. Their method could only have succeeded had there been no such reserves — a point on which Ludendorff was in singular error.

Foch drew the logical deduction from the tactics of surprise. He resolved to make the battle highly mobile. After striking a blow he would stay his hand as soon as serious resistance developed, and attack instantly in another place. The enemy would be subjected to a constant series of surprises; before his reserves could be got up he would have lost heavily in ground and men, his mass of manœuvre would be needed to fill up the gaps in his front, and by swift stages that mass of manœuvre would diminish. But for this result he needed a new weapon, and Haig provided it. Cambrai had shown the way, and on 4th July a small action was fought, which was to the last phase of the war what Neuve Chapelle had been to the first, a fount of new tactics. Haig, with the freeing of Amiens in view, had first to clear the Villers-Bretonneux plateau and take the village of Hamel. The task was entrusted to the Australian Corps in Rawlinson's Fourth Army, and they were given sixty tanks to help them. The affair was, as Sir John Monash, the Australian commander, described it, the "perfection of team-work"; the tanks overcame the German machine guns, and the Australian and part of an American division accounted for the German infantry. It was clear after Hamel that the tank was the

additional weapon required. There was now no need of a prolonged artillery bombardment; the tank was sufficient to sweep a path for the infantry. There was less need also for elaborate preparations before the battle, and consequently an attack could be rapidly designed for any area where the prospects seemed favourable. Foch was ready to break down the system of trench warfare and restore the open battle, because he had found a method to obviate the clumsiness of the modern military machine. His trust lay in a triple combination of which each part hinged upon the other — the weapon of the tank, the tactics of surprise, and the strategy of complete mobility.

But he was not yet ready for the grand climax, the decisive blow. It was still his business to wear down the enemy continuously and methodically by attacks on limited fronts, aiming at strictly limited objectives. The tactical freedom which was now his enabled him to ring the changes over the whole battle-ground. He would use his reserves discreetly and economically to "nourish the battle" and inflict the maximum damage on his opponents. But he would not press in any section for an ambitious advance, or endeavour to force a decision. The action must develop organically like a process of nature. From 21st March to 18th July he had stood patiently on the defensive; from July 18th to 8th August he had to win back the initiative, free his main communications, and dislocate Ludendorff's plans. From 8th August to 26th September it was his task to crumble the enemy's front, destroy the last remnants of his reserves, force him beyond all his prepared defences, and make ready for the final battle which should give victory.

## I

At first it would appear that Boehn did not realize the meaning of Mangin's success. He had eight divisions beyond the Marne, and the loss of the main highway from Soissons — for on the 19th the 2nd American Division had cut it — meant that they depended for supply upon the parish roads threading the wooded hills of the Tardenois. Every hour, too, that his men remained south of the river increased the peril of the thirty divisions inside the salient. But for the moment confusion seems to have reigned at German Headquarters, and nothing was done to protect the apex on Thursday, nor yet on Friday, the 19th, when Mangin and Degoutte were establishing their ground and beating off counter-



attacks. For thirty-six hours Boehn hesitated; then on the afternoon of the Friday he gave orders for the retreat. It began at 9 p.m. that evening. The plan was to crowd up all available reserves against Mangin, who was regarded as the chief danger. Two divisions were borrowed at once from Prince Rupprecht, and before the end of the month the enemy's strength against the French Tenth Army had risen to twenty-five divisions. Mangin, according to Foch's orders, held his hand. He had done all he had set out to do, and had cut the Soissons road; on the 21st the 1st American Division broadened the breach by taking Berzy-le-Sec; and it was now for Degoutte and de Mitry and Berthelot to take up the running. On Saturday, the 20th, the eight German divisions staggered back across the river under the concentrated fire of the French batteries from the high ground on their flanks. Degoutte advanced to link up with Mangin, whose right had now reached the villages of Parcy-Tigny and Villemontoire; de Mitry and Berthelot between them that evening had the whole southern bank of the Marne, and their outposts had begun to cross the river, while Berthelot had also made an advance between the Marne and Rheims. On the 19th the last-mentioned had received part of the British 22nd Corps, under Sir Alexander Godley, which took the place of the Italian 2nd Corps, and its 51st and 62nd Divisions made progress in the region of Marfaux and the Bois de Courton, thereby endangering the highroad along the Ardre which joined Fismes on the Vesle with Chatillon on the Marne.

On Sunday, the 21st, the Sixth and Fifth Armies struck in earnest. Degoutte's object was to outflank Boehn on the north bank of the Marne and drive him from the river. His French and American troops\* in a magnificent movement swept eastward to a front from Breny, on the Ourcq, to the west of Rocourt and Epieds; while de Mitry forced the river passage between Gland and Char-tèves. Château-Thierry was no longer tenable, and that evening the Americans of the 3rd Division were in its streets. The Allies were now close on the vital road junction of Oulchy-le-Château. Boehn had substantially narrowed his salient, and left only some six miles of river front as the mouth of the pocket. As his flank was turned on the west, it seemed reasonable to assume that he was in process of evacuating the whole area, and falling back on the Ourcq and the Vesle.

\* The Americans, in these actions on the Marne, were the 1st Corps, under Major-General Liggett, and the 3rd Corps, under Major-General Bullard, and included the 3rd, 26th, and 28th Divisions, with the 4th and 32nd in support.

On the contrary, he attempted a stand. On Monday, the 22nd, de Mitry crossed the river between Passy and Dormans, and at Port-à-Binson, south of Chatillon, occupying in the former area all the ground in the loop of the stream. A slight advance was also made north of the Ourcq, and Berthelot took the village of Bouilly at the northern end of the Montagne de Rheims. But on the 23rd there was a sudden stiffening of resistance in the south of the salient. Degoutte alone had some twenty German divisions against him, four of them from the fresh reserves of Prince Rupprecht. Boehn held out stoutly on his few miles of river front, the very place where his supply problem was at its worst. This defence, which involved the crowding of large reinforcements into a narrow area, was not necessary for a safe withdrawal; but Ludendorff was anxious to delay the retirement till he could get the hinterland cleared of stores. He had decided on a drastic policy. The projected Flanders offensive had been countermanded, and he had arranged for a falling back of Boehn's army to the Ville-en-Tardenois-Fère-en-Tardenois line on the night of the 26th, and behind the Vesle early in August. Only thus could he attain security.

On the 23rd, under the pressure of the counter-attack, the French were driven out of Vincelles; but de Mitry managed to press northwards at Jaulgonne, and between Passy and Dormans. That day Degoutte's left wing was in the outskirts of Oulchy, while his left centre south of the Ourcq entered Rocourt. Berthelot was heavily engaged, the British 51st and 62nd Divisions taking Marfaux, and Mangin began his attack against the slopes of Buzancy, east of the Soissons-Château-Thierry road, where two British divisions, the 34th and the Scottish 15th, were in action. On the 23rd, too, with the object of preventing Prince Rupprecht from sending further troops to the aid of the Crown Prince, the French First Army, under Debeney, attacked north of Montdidier, with the assistance of British tanks. It advanced 3,000 yards on a front of 7,000, capturing the villages of Mailly-Raineval, Sauvillers, and Aubvillers, and won the heights overlooking the Avre valley. By the evening of that day the Soissons-Château-Thierry road, save for the small section on the plateau south of Soissons, was wholly in Allied hands; three more miles had been gained up the Ourcq valley; the Americans with Degoutte were pressing along the Château-Thierry-Fère road; Boehn's front on the Marne was crumbling; and Berthelot was within two miles of the Fismes-Chatillon road. Twenty-five thousand prisoners and more than 400 guns had fallen to Foch.

The main threat now was against Fère-en-Tardenois, to which Oulchy was an advance guard. If Fère were to fall, the southern end of the salient would be gone prematurely, and Boehn accordingly put his chief weight into the defence of that section. The next move was with Degoutte, though Berthelot remained hard at work, and on the 24th the British 22nd Corps captured Vrigny, with 1,000 prisoners. The Sixth Army that day advanced in face of fierce opposition between the Ourcq and the Marne, till by the evening Degoutte's alignment, instead of being north and south, was now almost east and west. Next day, Thursday, 25th, Oulchyle-Château fell, and the centre advanced to within three miles of Fère-en-Tardenois. Late the following evening Boehn began the comprehensive retirement which had been ordered between the Ourcq and the Ardre. He had suffered the penalty of his tardiness. His Marne front was in desperate case, for the roads from Fère in the west and from Fismes in the east were alike threatened. There was no time to be lost if he wished to straighten his line. Nor had Degoutte less need for haste, for he must carry Fère-en-Tardenois before the enemy could establish his front from the upper Ourcq to the upper Vesle. Even if Boehn secured such a front, it would be little better than his front on the Marne, for Mangin lay waiting with an army rested and refitted to strike at its flank as Degoutte had struck at Château-Thierry. Such is the difficulty of a piecemeal withdrawal from a salient in face of a strong and watchful enemy; a fresh position finds itself already turned. With the facts of each new situation as it revealed itself Foch played as a master plays on an instrument of music.

Nevertheless, the German retreat from the Marne, by encumbered roads through a broken country, was a fine performance. Costly in life, hugely costly in *matériel*, it was much to Boehn's credit that he achieved it at all. On the 27th Degoutte and de Mitry pressed hard in pursuit, and Berthelot advanced to conform. East of Rheims Gouraud's Fourth Army made progress in the Moronvillers region south of Mont San Nom, and took nearly 2,000 prisoners. The whole day was a good example of skilful pressure exercised upon an embarrassed and retreating enemy. By the evening Berthelot was on a line from south of Ville-en-Tardenois to just south of St. Gemme. On his left de Mitry's line ran northwest through the forests of Ris and Fère. Degoutte was astride the Ourcq; Mangin was slowly working up the slopes east of the Soissons-Château-Thierry road, but was in difficulties at the château and village of Buzancy, while the advance of his right



wing north of Plessier Huleu was being strongly resisted in the wood of Plessier.

Next day, the 28th, Degoutte swung his right wing across the Ourcq and entered Fère-en-Tardenois, while the American 3rd Division pushed out of the Forest of Ris and took Ronchères. Berthelot was less fortunate, and had a hard struggle between St. Gemme and Chambrecy, but a British division with him succeeded in retaking the Montagne de Bligny. Signs were appearing of a more comprehensive German retreat, and the villages in rear of the enemy's line from Soissons to Bazoches were in flames. That day, too, Mangin had carried the strong point of Buzancy, where the 15th Scottish Division so distinguished themselves that by the orders of the French commander a memorial was erected on the battlefield to commemorate their valour.\* For the moment it seemed as if the German retreat was to be turned into a rout.

But the enemy was as yet far from beaten. On the morning of the 29th his whole front stiffened. Reinforcements had been huddled into his front lines, and all day vigorous counter-attacks took place in the battle area. At Sergy the 4th Guards Division attacked part of the American 42nd Division, which had recently come from Champagne, and was repulsed after some hours of desperate fighting. It was the same on the 30th, when, on the eastern side of the salient, Berthelot had to face a series of heavy counter-attacks in the neighbourhood of St. Euphraise. The enemy won back the station of Fère-en-Tardenois, and the American 32nd Division (Major-General Haan) at Cierges and Meunière Wood found every yard disputed. On the last day of July they swept forward and captured Cierges and the slopes beyond, while the French on their right were at last able to debouch from Meunière Wood.

Boehn had found a line which he believed he could hold, and it was now the business of Mangin to turn the flank of the defence as Degoutte had turned it on the Marne. We have seen that the ridge culminating in the heights of Grand Rozoy gave him an avenue into the heart of the German position. His right wing east of Plessier Huleu and the Soissons road was now ready for its final attack on the key-point, the hill called 205. Boehn lay along the edge of the plateau east of the lower Crise and its western tributary, and thence along the watershed between the Ourcq and the Vesle. As the Allies now stood, they had no direct observation over this

\* The monument was a rough stone pyramid, on one side of which was carved a thistle encircled with roses.

plateau and the roads from Braisne, Bazoches, and Fismes, which were the arteries of the German supply. But if they could carry Hill 205, they would enfilade the Crise valley, look over the five or six miles of downs to the Vesle, and even beyond to the roofs of Fismes. The hill was the key of the whole countryside, and its capture would force Boehn back upon the line of the Vesle heights.

Mangin struck at dawn on Thursday, 1st August, with his whole army, but especially with his right wing; and by nine in the morning he had the crest of Hill 205. Then followed two hours of furious counter-attacks, which achieved nothing. Late in the afternoon a new division of shock troops, borrowed from Prince Rupprecht, advanced to an attack which dwindled away into isolated rushes. Boehn admitted defeat, for not only was his front turned between the Ourcq and the Vesle, but his hold on Soissons was fatally loosened. There was nothing for it but retirement, and the Americans on Degoutte's right, fighting north of Sergy, found the enemy's resistance suddenly beginning to falter. On the 2nd the whole Allied line swept forward, and Mangin entered Soissons. Already, since 15th July, the Allies had taken some 40,000 prisoners. There could be no resting-place short of the Vesle. During the first days of August the whole countryside between Ourcq and Aisne was murky with the smoke of burning villages, while the four armies of France pressed in the contracting arc of the German front. On the 4th they had reached the line of the Aisne and the Vesle. Next day they forced the passage of the latter river at many places on both sides of Braisne, and crossed the Aisne just east of Soissons. That day American troops of the 32nd Division entered Fismes, and on the 6th ground was gained on the northern bank of the Vesle.\* Then once again came a halt. Boehn had reached a line on which he could stand. It was not a position to be altogether desired. The Chemin des Dames and the heights of the Vesle did not form a continuous ridge, for there was the valley of the Aisne between; and on the east the hills died away into levels, with Rheims as an Allied outpost to menace that flank. The Germans, however, mindful of the strength of the Aisne defences in 1914, turned to it as a natural refuge. But 1914 was not 1918; then Germany had had a great superiority in guns, and something not far from an equality in men; now

\* On this day Foch was made a Marshal of France. "The dignity of Marshal," said the decree of the President, "will not be merely a recompense for past services; it will consecrate for the future the authority of the great soldier who is called to lead the armies of the Entente to final victory."

superiority and equality had gone beyond recall. The Crown Prince had thrown in seventy-four divisions since 15th July, and had wholly used up his reserves, besides drawing largely from the neighbouring group commanders. Ludendorff at the best had no more than twenty-six reserve divisions at his disposal, and Foch had now a greater mass of manœuvre than his antagonist. Moreover, the disastrous Second Battle of the Marne had played havoc with the German first-line troops. Every division was under strength, and some, even of the picked units, were short by more than 30 per cent. Ten divisions were broken up, and the establishment of battalions was reduced from 850 to 750, or less. Indeed, so bad was the case that Ludendorff was compelled to appeal to Austria for men, and now for the first time an Austrian division was identified on the front in France.

The dreams of an attack on Amiens and an advance in Flanders were gone for ever; the initiative had definitely passed to the Allies, and Ludendorff's one aim was to find security for the coming winter. He must build up as soon as possible a new reserve, and to do this he must shorten his front at certain useless salients, such as those on the Lys and at Montdidier. He aimed at a winter front running along the Ypres and Wytschaete heights, continuing on the low ridges between the Lys and La Bassée, and from Arras to the Oise holding the crest of the Bapaume and Lassigny uplands. He had now stabilized the position on the Aisne, and he hoped that the French would break their teeth on his new front, and that the battle would decline into one of those fruitless struggles for a few miles of trench in which the old actions had been wont to die away.

He hoped in vain. Foch had no mind to waste one hour in operations which were not vital. At a conference held on 23rd July he had expounded his plan to his colleagues. He recounted what he regarded as the necessary preliminaries to the final battle — the freeing of the Paris–Nancy line in the Marne area; the freeing of the Paris–Amiens line; the reduction of the St. Mihiel salient; the liberation of the northern coal mines. The first had now been achieved, and the time was ripe for the second. He had won in the Marne salient by carrying an attack no further than the limit fixed by the advantage of surprise, and then striking swiftly elsewhere. It was his supreme merit that he saw the battle as a whole, and he was now preparing his deadly *arpeggio* on a far broader front. On Thursday, 8th August, Sir Douglas Haig, south of the Somme, flung his Fourth Army against Prince Rupprecht.



## II

During July the British and French armies north of the Oise had been slowly improving their position, and preparing a starting-place for attack. The Hamel action we have noted, but there were others. For example, on the 28th of June Plumer, with the 5th and 31st Divisions, advanced to the eastern edge of the Forest of Nieppe and at Merris; on the night of 30th June Byng took ground north-west of Albert; on the nights of 5th and 7th July Rawlinson gained ground on both sides of the Somme, and secured the whole ridge which runs east of Hamel and the Bois de Vaire. On 12th July the French First Army advanced more than a mile between Castel and Mailly-Raineval, capturing the former village. On the 19th the 9th Division retook the village of Méteren, while on the 23rd, as we have already seen, the French advanced two miles north of Montdidier; on the night of the 28th the Australians with Rawlinson went forward north of the Somme, and next day the village of Merris, south-west of Bailleul, was taken by the 1st Australian Division with Plumer. Early in August Ludendorff began his first withdrawal. On the 2nd Marwitz fell back across the Ancre between Dernancourt and Hamel, and there was a slight retirement north of the La Bassée Canal. Between the 5th and the 9th, east of Robecq, the British line was advanced more than a mile on a front of six. Ludendorff's intention was clear, and the moment had come for Haig to speed and confuse his departure.

The British Commander-in-Chief had two alternatives — to advance on the Lys or on the Somme, and he decided that the latter should take precedence. The area chosen for the new attack was the front of fourteen miles astride the Avre, the Luce, and the Somme from just south of the Amiens-Roye road to Morlancourt. The British forces for the past three months, save for the divisions engaged on the Aisne and the Marne, had had a time of comparative quiet, and the arrival of the Americans had given them opportunities of training new drafts out of the line. In this area were disposed the British Fourth Army under Rawlinson, and the left wing of the French First Army under Debeney — both forces temporarily under the British Commander-in-Chief. Infinite pains had been taken to make the surprise complete. By an elaborate piece of *camouflage* the enemy was induced to believe that an attack in Flanders was imminent. The Canadians, who, along

with the Australians, were cast for the principal part in the British attack, had been secretly brought down from the north a few days earlier, and only went into line just before the battle. The German front — the left of Marwitz's II. Army and the right of Hutier's XVIII. Army — was at the moment held by seven divisions, and there was no great depth of reserves behind. For the attack Haig had accumulated not less than 400 tanks, mostly of the "whippet" type. It was an occasion for the use of Foch's tactics in their purest form. There was to be no artillery bombardment except just at the moment of advance; the ground had been perfectly reconnoitred from the air; the objectives were ambitious but strictly defined; and the troops to be used were among the *corps d'élite* of assault in the British army. Rawlinson had seven divisions in line of battle. On the right the Canadian Corps had the 3rd, 1st, and 2nd Canadian Divisions in line, with the 4th in support. In the centre the Australian Corps had the 2nd and 3rd Australian Divisions in line, with the 5th and 4th in support. The left wing, north of the Somme, was held by the 3rd Corps, with the 58th and 18th Divisions in line, and the 12th in support. The three divisions of the Cavalry Corps under Kavanagh were waiting east of Amiens, and a special force of motor machine-gun brigades and Canadian cyclists had orders to operate along the Amiens-Roye road.

Strategically the area was of high importance. Haig's ultimate purpose was that of Foch, which has been already described; his immediate aim was to free his communications, as the French had freed theirs on the Marne. To this end the enemy must be driven out of range of Amiens and the Paris railway, Montdidier must be retaken, and the enemy's own communications must be broken by the domination of the important road and rail-centre of Chaulnes. The battle-ground was of the familiar type of the Santerre plateau. North of the Somme the downs ran southward into an awkward spur in the bend of the river at Chipilly. In the south, in the valley of the Avre, long bare slopes gave a similar advantage to the German defence. The centre between the Somme and the Avre was open upland, sprinkled with coppices, which presented no natural obstacle. From Amiens ran straight as an arrow the two great Roman highways to St. Quentin and to Roye, and there were dozens of good parish roads to link them up. The whole countryside was an ideal area for tanks, being dry and unenclosed, while the Roman highways provided avenues to direct the assault. An immediate success in the centre

was a practical certainty, but it looked as if the two flanks might have severe fighting.

In the first week of August much rain fell, and on the night of the 7th a heavy mist soaked out of the ground. When day dawned on Thursday, the 8th, it was such another morning as 21st March. Just before daybreak an intense bombardment was opened between the Ancre and the Avre. Four minutes later it stopped, and the tanks and infantry moved forward. Rawlinson advanced at 4.20, Debeney some twenty minutes later.

In the centre success was immediate and continuous. The Canadians and Australians, pressing along the two Roman roads, marched steadily towards their final objectives. Long before noon they had taken Démuin and Marcelcave, and were beyond the main Albert-Montdidier highway. Hutier was completely surprised. At one point the British tanks took captive a German regimental mess while it was breakfasting; at another the whole staff of a division was seized; in some villages the Germans were taken in their billets before they knew what had happened, and parties of the enemy were made prisoner when working in the harvest fields. The Canadian cavalry passed through the infantry and captured a train on the line near Chaulnes. Indeed that day the whole British cavalry performed miracles, advancing twenty-three miles from their points of concentration. Only on the flanks was there any hindrance. North of the Somme the 3rd Corps carried the woods of Gressaire and Chipilly in the river bend; but they failed to take Morlancourt, and before nightfall a vigorous German counter-attack recovered Chipilly. So, too, Debeney on his three miles of front had difficulties at Morisel, in the Avre valley. This fell about 8 a.m., and there began a long fight for Moreuil and for the woods on the edge of the crest. When these were taken the enemy resistance broke, and Debeney was able to bring up his wing level with the British centre. That night the new line ran, from left to right, west of Morlancourt, along the slopes just west of Chipilly, just west of Framerville, and thence through Caix, Beaucourt, and Rozainvillers-Plessier to Pierrepont. The whole of the Amiens outer defence line had been gained except at Le Quesnel, and that fell during the night. The Allied front was within four miles of Chaulnes, and the salient of Montdidier had become dangerously sharpened.

This conspicuous success — in Ludendorff's phrase "the black day of the German army in the history of the war" — was due to the brilliant tactical surprise and the high efficiency of the new



tanks.\* But it was also due in some degree to a clearly-marked deterioration in the quality of the German infantry on that part of the front. The machine-gun detachments especially did not display their old tenacity. The Allied casualties were extraordinarily small, one Canadian division, which was in the heart of the battle, losing only 100 men. Debeney had mastered the difficulties of the Avre valley, but the British left north of the Somme was still awkwardly placed owing to the loss of Chipilly. On the morning of Friday, 9th, however, the 3rd Corps, with the assistance of a regiment of the American 33rd Division (Major-General Higginson), made a fresh attack, captured Morlancourt, on the Ancre, and the high ground beyond it, took Chipilly village, and cleared the whole of the Chipilly bend. In the centre the Allied front was advanced — largely by the brilliant work of the cavalry — to the outskirts of Méricourt and Proyart, and thence lay by Méharicourt, Rouvroy, Arvillers, and Contoire to Pierrepont on the Avre. This front seriously outflanked Montdidier on the north, but there was more to follow.

For on the 10th Humbert's French Third Army struck in on the south flank of the salient between Montdidier and the Matz. Humbert had received no reinforcements, and had only the troops which at the moment were holding the line; but his attack was the extra blow needed to complete the work of Rawlinson and Debeney on the north. He took the villages of Le Tronquoy and Le Fretoy, and rang the knell of the enemy in Montdidier. The Germans did not appear to realize their danger, for Debeney and Humbert pushed on through the darkness of the night, and by the morning reached Faverolles and cut the road to Roye, by which alone retreat was possible. During Saturday, the 10th, the Montdidier garrison surrendered, and large quantities of material fell into Allied hands. All day the British and the French pressed forward, and by nightfall were six miles east of the town. Rawlinson was close on Lihons, Debeney was in La Boissière, and Humbert held Fécamps and Conchy.

That day's work had important consequences. It put Chaulnes at the mercy of the Allies, for the place was now under direct observation not 3,000 yards away. Roye itself was under their guns, though at long range. The great Amiens-Paris railway was

\* One whippet, "Musical Box" by name, pushed through to more than six miles behind the German front, and did immense damage. Its surprising adventures may be read of in Sir A. Montgomery's *Story of the Fourth Army*, Appendix K, and Major Williams-Ellis's *The Tank Corps*, p. 201, etc.

completely freed for traffic, as was also the other line which ran up the Avre valley to Montdidier. Prince Rupprecht's reserves had been drawn into the battle, and the original seven German divisions on the front had now grown to sixteen. Hutier inside the salient was severely straitened in his communications, and had now no line of lateral supply not directly threatened. Foch had repeated his tactical performance of 18th July on the Marne. He had freed his own communications and cut the enemy's, and the heights of Lassigny, towards which Humbert was striving, exactly paralleled that Hill 205 above Rozoy, the taking of which by Mangin had driven Boehn back to the Vesle.

During the night of the 10th Rawlinson advanced astride the Somme and carried the high ground north of the river between Etinehem and Dernancourt, thus widening the battle front. On Sunday, the 11th, Hutier flung in fresh divisions to check the British advance. He retook the hill west of Lihons, but was driven off it, though he still held part of the town. He struck also against Humbert, and checked the speed of his progress. Next day, the 12th, Rawlinson advanced south of the Somme, taking Proyart and clearing Lihons; and Debeney had some small gains south-west of Roye. The following day Humbert made progress east of the Matz, and took the isolated western outlier of the Lassigny range and the village of Gury. On the 14th he was in Belval, north of the heights, and his right wing carried Ribecourt, on the Oise. On the 15th the whole of the Lassigny *massif* was in his hands, and he had direct observation over the plain to the north, and the communications of all the enemy's southern front in the salient.

The first phase of the Allies' offensive, which may be called the Battle of Amiens, had now reached its close, for they were in the old battle area, whose tangled wilderness gave unrivalled opportunities for defence, and the enemy had been heavily reinforced. He had a moment of respite; but it had been won at the expense of his waning reserves. Since 8th August he had employed thirty-five divisions. He had lost the use of Chaulnes, and of the lateral railway from Péronne to Roye, and the fall of the Lassigny range made a further retreat inevitable. In all the west Ludendorff had now only sixteen fresh divisions in reserve, of which eleven belonged to Prince Rupprecht's group. His chance of a counter-stroke had gone for ever, and the most he could hope for was to hold the line of upland between Arras and the Oise till he could make an orderly retreat to the Siegfried Line for winter quarters.

For that purpose he created a new army group under Boehn, comprising the II., XVIII., and IX. Armies, which took position between Prince Rupprecht and the Imperial Crown Prince, from Albert to Soissons. At the same time he was busy shortening his front on the Lys and the Ancre, and by the 15th we were in Locon and Calonne, in the first area, and had regained Beaumont Hamel, Serre, Puisieux, and Bucquoy, in the second.

The mental condition of the enemy has been described by Sir Douglas Haig: "Buoyed up by the hope of immediate and decisive victory, to be followed by an early and favourable peace, constantly assured that the Allied reserves were exhausted, the German soldiery suddenly found themselves attacked on two fronts and thrown back with heavy losses from large and important portions of their earlier gains. The reaction was inevitable and of a deep and lasting character." The effect upon their leaders was still graver. Ludendorff tendered his resignation, which was not accepted. At conferences at Spa on the 13th and 14th August with the Emperor and the Imperial Chancellor he urged that peace should be sought at once on the best terms obtainable; but the civilian statesmen did not dare as yet to undeceive their people. Meantime his one hope was a slow and stubborn retreat to the Siegfried system. Between the 8th and 15th the Allies had taken over 30,000 prisoners, of whom 22,000 had fallen to Rawlinson's army. With thirteen divisions of infantry and three of cavalry, the British Fourth Army had engaged and defeated twenty German divisions. On the 15th mass was said in Amiens Cathedral in thanksgiving for the final deliverance of that city.

Foch had no intention of affording Ludendorff a leisurely retreat. It was his business to hustle him as soon as possible from what he had chosen as his intermediate line — the Bapaume ridge and the Somme south of Péronne. The fighting of the 15th and 16th convinced him that Debeney and Humbert had for the moment reached the limits of fruitful advance. Roye was still in German hands, though Debeney's position on Cæsar's Camp prevented any use of the place by the enemy. It was time for a new blow in a new quarter. On the 17th Mangin, with the French Tenth Army, struck between the Oise and the Aisne against the awkwardly placed right wing of Carlowitz's IX. Army.

It was a strictly limited operation on a short section of ten miles, and it began by small actions. Mangin, on the first day, advanced for about a mile, took 1,700 prisoners, and occupied the plateau west of Nampcel. It was an adroit performance, for



Boehn, much harassed by requests for reinforcements everywhere, disregarded the business as only a local attack. He withdrew his troops there to the battle zone and waited. But next day Mangin pressed in on a broader front. His men were very weary, having been long in battle; but the indomitable spirit of their general lifted them forward, and he varied his hour of attack so cunningly that he wholly confused the enemy. On the 20th he struck harder on a front of sixteen miles, and approached the Ailette, taking 8,000 prisoners and 200 guns. He had established himself firmly on the western part of the Heights of the Aisne, and threatened alike the German front on that river and their line west of the Oise. Three divisions were spared by Boehn from his reserve, including the Bavarian Alpine Corps, but they were too late to save the critical ground. The result was that by the evening of the 20th the whole front was closely engaged on the hundred miles between the Avre and the Vesle, and Boehn and the Crown Prince had every man they could muster involved in its defence. It might well have seemed impossible to Ludendorff that the energy of the Allies could find a new battle-ground; but he was still far from grasping the relentless assiduity of Foch's plan. On the night of the 20th, Mangin, having done his work, held his hand. On the morning of Wednesday, the 21st, Byng struck with the British Third Army.

### III

At first Foch had wished to direct the next British blow on the Roye-Chaulnes position, but Haig had persuaded him that the better plan was to outflank it from the north. The British commander correctly divined Ludendorff's mind, and, since the Siegfried Line was nearer his front between Arras and Albert than farther south, he resolved to upset the enemy calculation by striking direct at the sanctuary. He had other reasons for this course. Owing to Rawlinson's success south of the Somme the Germans held an awkward salient, which might be shattered by a blow on its northern side. He wished to turn from the north the line of the Somme south of Péronne as a step towards the main objective Cambrai-St. Quentin. Again, north of the Ancre the ground was less shell-pitted and more suitable for tanks. His aim was by a limited advance to recover the Arras-Albert railway, and two days later to deliver a general attack north of the Somme with the Third and Fourth Armies.

There has rarely been a more complete surprise. All week the enemy had been slowly falling back from his uglier salients north and south of the Lys and south of Arras. The British were again in Merville and Outtersteene, and the Germans on the Ancre were feeling their way towards a securer position for the defence of the Bapaume ridge. But Byng struck before they were ready, and his purpose was that of Haig on July 1, 1916. He sought to turn the uplands by an advance north of the Ancre, an enterprise which had failed in the earlier battle, with the result that the British had been compelled to resort to a frontal attack. This time the plan was subtler, for the turning movement was not an isolated action but part of a vast co-ordinated engagement. The possession of the plateau around Bucquoy and Ablainzeville gave us an advantage which we had not possessed in 1916.

It was a thick morning when Byng advanced at 4.55 a.m. — the weather of 8th August and of 21st March. On a front of nine miles between Moyenneville and Beaucourt, the 42nd, New Zealand, and 37th Divisions of Harper's 4th Corps, and the 2nd and Guards Divisions of Haldane's 6th Corps, broke through the enemy front at the first rush. Then the 5th, 63rd, and 3rd Divisions passed through and completed the work, and the 21st Division cleared the Ancre bank. Beaucourt was taken, and Achiet-le-Petit, Courcelles, and Moyenneville — names known too well to us in the old Somme fighting — and by the evening we had advanced between two and three miles to where the enemy made a stand along the Albert–Arras railway. It was sufficient, for Haig did not need to hasten. He was still only "nourishing the battle." Next day, the 22nd, the left wing of Rawlinson's Fourth Army, the 47th, 12th, and 18th Divisions of the 3rd Corps, with the 3rd Australians and the 38th Division on either flank, came into action between Albert and the Somme, and had a like success. Albert was recovered by the 18th Division, and the village of Méaulte, and our line was pushed two miles beyond Méaulte to the slopes looking towards Fricourt. Meantime Humbert had taken Lassigny town on the 21st, and Boehn was withdrawing to the south bank of the Oise everywhere between Guny and Pontoise.

The ground was now prepared for the main operation — for that last of the many Somme actions, which may be called the Battle of Bapaume. The Germans were in retreat on a wide front, and it was our business to confuse and cripple their withdrawal. On the 23rd Byng and Rawlinson, on the thirty-three miles of line between Lihons and Mercatel, made steady progress. At 4.45

a.m., south of the Somme, the 32nd and the 1st Australian Divisions advanced two miles, taking Chuignolles and Chuignes, and over 2,000 prisoners. North of the river the 18th and 38th Divisions of the 3rd and 5th Corps pushed east and south of Albert, while the 4th and 6th Corps attacked the Miraumont-Boiry-Becquerelle line. Gomiécourt, Ervillers, and Boyelles were taken, and we won a footing on the Thiepval ridge. Byng was now astride the Arras-Bapaume road, and closing in on the latter place from the north. That night the Australians took Bray. On the 24th the whole Thiepval ridge was cleared by a brilliant concentric attack, in which the 38th Division greatly distinguished itself, and Byng was on the edge of Bapaume. By the 25th we had Mametz, Martinpuich, and Le Sars; but there was a stiff knuckle of resistance round Bapaume itself. On the 26th Debeney took Fresnoy, and on the 27th he was at last in Roye, and Boehn was in full retreat between that town and the Oise. By the 28th the French First Army had pushed forward nine miles to the upper Somme and the Canal du Nord.

Meantime, on the 26th, Haig had struck again, this time with Horne's First Army astride the Scarpe. The last of the battles of Arras was beginning — a preparation for the next great stage of the British advance. At 3 a.m. Sir Arthur Currie, with the 51st Division, and the 2nd and 3rd Canadians, attacked on a five-mile front. Wancourt was taken, and the old storm centre of Monchy and Guémappe, and he finished by nightfall in the outskirts of Roeux, winning as much in a day as had been won in six weeks in that area during the 1917 Battle of Arras. Next day the advance continued, and Roeux and Gavrelle fell. This was a grave matter for Ludendorff, for he saw both his line and his reserves shrinking with a perilous speed — in seven days the British alone had taken 26,000 prisoners. The Bapaume ridge, thanks to our brilliant outflanking movements, was already all but lost, and Horne, on the Scarpe, threatened to turn the Siegfried Line itself. In that region the British were already beyond the front they had held on 21st March. But he still clung to his hope of an intermediate stand, to enable him to withdraw in good order to the Siegfried system when the weather broke. His scheme was to take position on a front which was roughly that of the Ailette and the Oise, the upper Somme and the Tortille.

On Thursday, 29th August, Boehn was retreating to this line. To hold it, he had to retain Péronne; but he cannot have hoped that he could retain it long. He was fighting for time —



time to get back to the Siegfried positions without too great a loss in men and guns. Once there, in that great fortified zone seven miles deep, he believed he could stand fast for the winter. But he was preparing for the worst, for he gave orders for the preparation of a new position farther east, the Hermann Line from the upper Scheldt by Solesmes and Le Cateau and Guise to the Hunding and Bruneilde positions in the south. That day Rawlinson had Combles and Morval, and Byng's New Zealanders at last entered Bapaume. Farther north Byng had already been twenty-four hours in Croisilles, and Horne had taken Greenland Hill. South of the Somme we held the western bank opposite Brie and Péronne, and occupied Hem. Debeney was on the river line to our right, and Humbert was in Noyon. The fall of Bapaume was a grave matter for the enemy, for it lost him a large accumulation of stores and it opened up to Byng the road to Cambrai.

On the 30th Horne moved along the Arras-Cambrai road, and found the enemy resistance stiffening. Nevertheless, by the evening the Canadians were in the skirts of Ecoust-St. Mein and Haucourt, and the British on their left had taken Eterpigny. Horne was now in close touch with the famous Drocourt-Quéant Switch, which, it will be remembered, had been constructed to link up the Siegfried Line proper with the old German front south of Lens, after the Battle of Arras had destroyed the northern Siegfried pivot. Farther south we reached the edge of Bullecourt, and took Bancourt and Vaulx-Vraucourt. In the French area Debeney, Humbert, and Mangin all made ground. But the great blow was struck by the 2nd Australians, with Rawlinson. By a superb operation conducted in the darkness their 5th Brigade crossed the Somme on the night of the 30th, and captured the German trenches south-east of Cléry. At five in the morning of the 31st it rushed Mont St. Quentin, the key of Péronne — a position defended by picked German troops. This attack, made with little artillery support by a small force, was one of the most amazing achievements in the war. That day there were violent counter-attacks against all the new British line between the Scarpe and the Somme, but they were repelled with ease, and Marrières Wood, north of Péronne, the scene of the famous stand of the South Africans in March, was taken. On 1st September the 14th Brigade of the 5th Australian Division entered Péronne, while we gained a long string of villages to the north — Bouchavesnes, Rancourt, Sailly-Saillisel, and Bullecourt. Mangin that day pushed north of the Ailette to the west of Coucy-le-Château, and Debeney advanced

east of Nesle. In Flanders we retook Bailleul station, crossed the Lawe River, and were about to recapture Kemmel Hill. Ludendorff's intermediate position had gone, and he was once more a wanderer.\*

He still struggled to find a resting-place short of the main Siegfried Line, but clearly there was no such position in the southern sector, once the upper Somme had been crossed. In the north, however, he had the line of the Canal du Nord, a water line which he hoped would be an obstacle too difficult for tanks to cross. His problem now was not to stand, but how to find the means of retiring. The ceaseless pressure of the Allies delayed his going, and unless he found some intermediate defence, he might never reach the Siegfried zone. He hoped, by means of the Canal du Nord, to check Byng, while to the north and south his men retired before Horne and Rawlinson behind the Drocourt-Quéant Switch and the main Siegfried front.

But he had not reckoned with Haig. On Monday, 2nd September, while Rawlinson was advancing swiftly east of Péronne, and Byng was beyond Croisilles and Bullecourt, the right wing of Horne's First Army, Sir Arthur Currie's Canadian Corps, including the 4th British Division and the 1st and 4th Canadians, and the left wing of the Third Army, Sir Charles Fergusson's 17th Corps, comprising the 52nd, 57th, and 63rd Divisions, attacked at 5 a.m. astride the Arras-Cambrai road against the Drocourt-Quéant Switch. It was, as the Germans well knew, the key of their whole front, and they had no less than eleven divisions on the nine miles between the Sensée and the Quéant. The attack went clean through all the lines of one of the strongest positions in the West, and took six miles of the Switch, the villages of Etaing, Dury (with the important hill of Dury), Villers-lès-Cagnicourt, Cagnicourt, and Noreuil, and 8,000 prisoners.†

The feat was beyond doubt one of the greatest in the campaign, and it made Ludendorff's plan for an immediate stand impossible. He had no time for counter-attacks, but hurried his troops in the south behind the Canal du Nord, and, in place of the old Switch, put his trust in the line of water and marsh in the Sensée valley east of Etaing which protected Douai, and which

\* In the actions which may be collectively called the Battle of Bapaume twenty-three divisions of the British Third and Fourth Armies defeated thirty-five German divisions, taking over 34,000 prisoners and 270 guns.

† In the whole Battle of the Scarpe between 26th August and 3rd September the British took over 16,000 prisoners and some 200 guns.

was continued southward from Marquion by the Agache River and the Canal du Nord. By the evening of the 4th our troops were on the canal bank, and found the enemy entrenched on the east side everywhere from the Scarpe to the Tortille.

Next day, south of Péronne, both Rawlinson and Debeney crossed the Somme. The former by the evening held the line Athies-Doingt-Bussu, and the latter the line Berlancourt-Guivry-Marest. Mangin was now well north of the Ailette, while his right wing was moving eastward along the Chemin des Dames, and the French Sixth and Fifth Armies had driven the Germans from the Vesle, and stood on the crest between that stream and the Aisne. In Flanders we had recovered Neuve Chapelle and Fauquissart, and north of the Lys Plumer's front ran from Voormezeele by Wulverghem to Ploegsteert. Lens had been evacuated, but not yet entered by Horne's troops.

The German front now presented a curious spectacle. The flank of the Siegfried zone had been turned, but the attack was temporarily checked by a water line. Farther south the enemy attempted to hold the Canal du Nord to cover his retreat, but this front had also been turned on 4th September by the passage of the Tortille river and the canal north of Moislains by the British. South, again, Marwitz and Hutier were falling back at their best speed to the Siegfried zone with no chance of an intermediate stand. Meantime Humbert was working his way up the right bank of the Oise, and Mangin's pincers were feeling at the St. Gobain *massif*, which played to the south of the Siegfried zone the part which the Drocourt-Quéant Switch had been meant to play in the north. Here, however, the French had a difficult problem, for the gap between the St. Gobain Forest and the Oise and the valley of the Ailette were alike too narrow for an easy advance. Farther east the enemy hold on the Aisne heights was endangered. The whole front, which Ludendorff had vainly hoped to establish for the winter in impenetrable defences, was now a thing of angles and patches, and parts of it as fluid as wax under flame.

For a week the Allied armies were occupied only in pressing the German retreat. They struck no great blow, for their immediate task was to secure the kind of front from which they could launch that final battle for which Foch had been preparing since July. Douai was covered by the water line, Cambrai and St. Quentin by the Siegfried zone, and Laon by the difficulties of the St. Gobain *massif*. Foch had no intention of doing the obvious thing, and



delivering a direct attack against sectors on which the enemy would be prepared to meet him. His tactical method was to secure surprise, and strategically his attacks were co-ordinated after the fashion of pincers.

On the 6th Rawlinson advanced seven miles east of Péronne, while Byng reached the western end of Havrincourt Wood. Debeney took Ham, and Humbert pushed two miles beyond Chauny and approached Tergnier. Mangin occupied the lower forest of Coucy, and Degoutte broadened his front towards the Aisne. On the 7th Byng took the greater part of Havrincourt Wood, and Rawlinson was in Beauvois and Roisel, while Humbert took Tergnier and crossed the St. Quentin Canal, and Mangin, on the Aisne plateau, pressed north of Vauxaillon. By the 10th Rawlinson was for the most part in the old British reserve lines constructed prior to 21st March, Byng and Horne were beyond our front of that date, while from La Fère to the Ailette Hutier was back in the position from which the enemy's offensive had begun. He had drawn in his front between the Sensée and the Oise, and from the Scarpe to the Aisne was holding practically a straight line. The result of this was to shorten his front by seventy miles, as compared with the 14th of July, which meant a saving of over thirty divisions. Nevertheless, he was hard pressed for men. Since March he had lost more than one and a half millions, and as reinforcements he had only the 1920 class, already partly drawn upon, 100,000 men scraped up from the interior and the lines of communication, and the 70,000 wounded who returned every month from hospitals. These reserves were far too few, the more so as their *moral* was clearly declining, and Ludendorff laboured to strengthen every natural defence, such as his northern pillar on the Passchendaele and Wytschaete heights, and to increase by inundations the depth of the water line. He also pushed on his preparation of positions in the rear, the Hermann line and the Antwerp-Meuse line, and evacuated the civilian population from Douai, Cambrai, and St. Quentin. He had cause for his anxiety, for the whole complexion of the war had changed. Between March and May 1917 the British had forced the Germans back to the Siegfried zone, taking in the process 21,000 prisoners and 200 guns. In 1918, starting from a front many miles farther west, they had performed the same feat in one month, and had 70,000 prisoners and 700 guns to their credit.

North of Havrincourt the enemy was behind the Canal du Nord, and south of it the Siegfried Line ran along the La Vacquerie

and Bonavis ridges to the Scheldt Canal, and thence to St. Quentin. In front of that line he held strong forward positions about Havrincourt and Epéhy, which must be taken before the main zone could be assaulted. Accordingly, on the morning of Thursday, 12th September, Byng struck with the 4th and 6th Corps between Trescault and Havrincourt. He took both villages, and cleared the ground for the coming battle. That same day, far to the south, Foch began a new action, the last of the preliminaries which he had set himself.

#### IV

His aim was to wipe out the St. Mihiel salient, and open the gate to the Woëvre and the vital railway which fed the enemy on the Aisne and the Oise. The enemy position at St. Mihiel, like most salients, was the relic of an unsuccessful offensive. The great German plan in 1914 had included an enveloping movement by the Gap of Nancy and the Heights of the Meuse, as well as by the Sambre and the Oise. The movement failed, but it left in the third week of September 1914 a sharp salient running from Fresnes due south over the wooded hills to a bridgehead on the west bank of the river opposite St. Mihiel, and thence east to Pont-à-Mousson and the Moselle. This triangle was some fifteen miles long on its northern side, and twenty-five on its southern. It was the sharpest on the whole front; but owing to the curious blind nature of the country, and to the fact that within it there ran to the apex a sheltered avenue for communications, it had so far been retained by the enemy. It was vigorously assaulted by the French in the spring of 1915, from both north and south, but it was never seriously threatened. For offensive purposes it was of value to the Germans, for it threatened at long range the main line from Bar-le-Duc to Nancy, and it entirely cut the railway running down the Meuse valley from Commercy to Verdun. The result was that the Verdun corner was always an isolated part of the French front, and it was largely for this reason that the Crown Prince launched his attack there in February 1916. Defensively it was important as protecting Metz and the Briey mines. But there was no section of the front where a considerable advance by the Allies would have more profound strategical results. Because of the Ardennes, the main communications of the enemy with Germany were sharply divided into two. There was a northern system from Liège through the Belgian plain, which served everything

as far south as St. Quentin; and there was a southern system through Trèves and Luxembourg, and through Mayence and Metz, which supplied the front from Laon to Lorraine. If the Allies advanced to the key junction of Longuyon the whole southern system would vanish; if they cut the main lateral line anywhere it would be grievously put out of gear. The plain of the Woëvre was a nerve centre of the German battle-line.

On 11th September the army group of Gallwitz had a detachment of six divisions under Fuchs on the forty miles between Fresnes and Pont-à-Mousson, but since the divisions were not at full strength the force was not more than 50,000 men. Two of these divisions were in the apex of the salient. As local reserves there were two further German divisions and one Austro-Hungarian. Ludendorff's extreme shortage of men had decided him to evacuate the salient, and the withdrawal would have begun on the 12th. But he had delayed too long, for Foch was aware of his plan and struck while he was in the act of retirement.

From the early days of August Pershing had been collecting his far-flung divisions, and by the end of that month the American First Army had been created under his own command. He had now at his disposal four corps staffs and twenty divisions fit for the line, besides the three engaged in the British area.\* The time had come to create an American sector of the front held by American forces. At the most these troops had had six months' experience on the battle-ground, and, judging by the time which it took Britain and France to master the ritual of modern war, the experiment did not lack boldness. Yet it was right that it should be made, for America's war effort must culminate as soon as possible in the appearance of her own armies under her own generals. In this, the first major action of America in the field, the French Staff were called in to assist in the scheme, and various seasoned French units were added to the American troops. On the night of the 11th the dispositions at St. Mihiel were these: At the southern side of the salient, on the extreme right, lay General Liggett's 1st American Corps, with in line from right to left the 82nd, 90th, 5th, and 2nd Divisions, and the 78th in reserve. On the left lay the 4th American Corps, under General Dickman, with in line the 89th, 42nd, and 1st Divisions, and the 3rd in reserve. West from Richecourt, around the apex of the salient, was the

\* Three American corps had been so far engaged in the main battle—the 1st (General Liggett) and the 3rd (General Bullard) on the Ourcq and Vesle, and the 2nd (General Read) on the Somme.



French 2nd Colonial Corps, under Blondlat. On the north-west side of the salient lay the 5th American Corps under General Cameron, with in line the 26th American, the 15th French, and the 4th American Divisions. The whole forces were under the American Commander-in-Chief.

At one o'clock on the morning of the 12th the American artillery opened on the eleven-mile front from Fey-en-Haye to Xivray. At five o'clock the first wave of attack crossed the parapets, accompanied by flotillas of tanks. An immense number of Allied airplanes accompanied the advance, and not an enemy machine was seen in the sky. The main attack was from the south, and it moved fast through the narrow lanes and thick woods on the rim of the salient, while the northern attack south of Fresnes struggled southward to join hands. By 10 a.m. the Americans were in Thiaucourt, and had cut the railway within the salient, which meant that the German divisions at the apex were caught between two fires. Meantime the northern attack had taken Combres and reached Dommartin-la-Montagne, while American cavalry were scouring the by-paths of the forests. All day the battle lasted, and early on the morning of the 13th September the northern and southern forces met at Vigneulles,\* and the salient had disappeared. For three days the battle continued, and at the close of it the Heights of the Meuse were entirely cleared of the enemy, and the Allied line ran from the Meurthe below Pont-à-Mousson, north of the Bois-le-Prêtre, three miles to the east of Thiaucourt, two miles east of St. Benoit, two miles east of Fresnes, and thence along the eastern foot of the Meuse heights to the old Verdun front at Bezonvaux. Already the advance guard of the Americans were under the fire of the fortress guns of Metz. Sixteen thousand prisoners and over 400 guns had been taken, together with a mass of every kind of stores. The losses of the Allies were very small. Two American divisions had only 300 and 600 casualties apiece, while one division of French cavalry, which took 2,500 prisoners, had only four men killed.

The destruction of the St. Mihiel wedge was an achievement of the utmost significance. It proved, if proof were needed, the quality of American troops organized in the largest units and acting under their own commanders. Strategically, it vastly assisted the Allied communications, and restored in that area the power of attack at any moment and in any direction. In truth, in that

\* The 26th Division from the north won this race, closely followed by the 1st from the south.





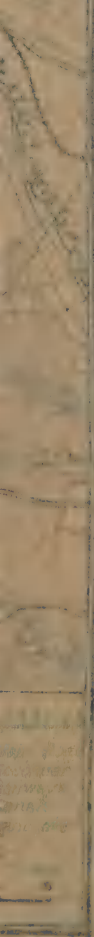
THE BRITISH ADVANCE ON THE HINDENBURG  
(SIEGFRIED) LINE.  
(Facing p. 334.)

THE BRITISH ADVANCE ON THE HINDENBURG

(SIEGFRIED) LINE.

(Facing p. 334.)

Foot of Hill





angle of our front which had its apex at Verdun the Allies were now in the position which the Germans had held in the northern salient before the March offensive. They could strike at their will east into Lorraine, or north down the Meuse and into Champagne, and till the attack was delivered the enemy could not tell which side was their objective. In that angle lay the United States First Army, and other American armies would follow, so that the concentration of the great new Allied reserves had taken place in a region which menaced more than any other the whole existence of the German front. No enemy salient any longer was left as an advance guard in the West.

Something still remained to be done in the north, for in certain sections Haig was not yet in close enough touch with the Siegfried zone. On the 13th Byng advanced in the Gouzeaucourt and Havrincourt area; on the 15th Rawlinson took Maissemy, and on the 17th Holnon. Meantime, on the 14th, Mangin and Degoutte had attacked north of the Aisne and along the Vesle, and the former took Allemant and Laffaux Mill, and next day Vailly and the key position of Mont des Singes. On the 18th Byng and Rawlinson struck on a front of thirteen miles between Holnon and Gouzeaucourt, and made an advance of some two miles, while a counter-attack between Trescault and Mœuvres was repulsed during the afternoon. Next day Byng retook Mœuvres, the greater part of which had been lost on the 17th. On the 18th Debeney, fighting on a front of six miles west and south-west of St. Quentin, took Savy Wood, and on the 19th Humbert increased his ground east of the Crozat Canal. All this time Plumer and Horne were steadily making local gains in their area to prepare the way for the coming battle. Thereafter there was a lull, but on the 24th Rawlinson pushed forward between the Omignon and St. Quentin, and took Selency. South of St. Quentin Debeney had been steadily creeping on, and by the 24th had taken Essigny, and reached the right bank of the Oise. The stage had now been set, and Byng, Rawlinson, Debeney, and Humbert from the Scarpe to the Oise were close up against the last German defences, while Mangin had fought his way to the edge of the Chemin des Dames.

Foch was now ready for his supreme effort. Since 15th July he had reduced the enemy's strength by half a million, and with the aid of the American reserves had increased his own by the same number. Ludendorff had no longer sufficient troops to defend his long western front. He could only save a breakdown in one part by thinning another, and if the attacks were simultaneous

he could not repel them. His sole hope was his water-line and the Siegfried zone, continued to the south and east by the Brunehilde and Hunding lines — positions to which the Allies had not yet advanced. The Siegfried zone, as German military commentators about this time told their countrymen for their comfort, was not a line, but a fortified quadrilateral, 38 miles by 25, "a granite wall of 24,000 square kilometres." Ludendorff issued to his divisions elaborate instructions about tactical precautions against tanks, but he relied chiefly on his prepared defences. These, he hoped, would enable him to stand with a minimum garrison, till such time as the coming of winter took the edge off the Allies' ardour.

But before Foch struck news came of great doings in the East. On 12th September Franchet d'Esperey had moved forward in the Balkans, and on the 19th Allenby had begun his whirlwind advance in Palestine. Germany was already drawing in all her outland detachments for the defence of the West; she was pleading with Austria for support; and Turkey and Bulgaria were left to their own resources. The moment had come for the Allies to press in everywhere on the yielding fortress.

## CHAPTER XCVIII

### THE DOWNFALL OF BULGARIA AND TURKEY

*December 9, 1917—October 31, 1918*

Bulgaria's Growing Discontent—Allied and Enemy Dispositions in the Balkans—The Attack of 15th September—The Serbians break the Bulgarian Front—Capture of Prilep—Attack of British and Greeks—Bulgaria sues for Peace—The Armistice signed—Consequences for Germany—Allenby's Doings after the Capture of Jerusalem—Jericho taken—The Two Raids East of Jordan—The Summer Stagnation—The Final Campaign—Its Plan—The Attack of 21st September—Destruction of Turkish VIII. and VII. Armies—Retreat of Turkish IV. Army—Capture of Damascus—Capture of Aleppo—Bagdad Railway reached—Turkey surrenders.

#### I

ON 21st June M. Malinov succeeded M. Radoslavov as Premier of Bulgaria. There was no popular movement behind the change; it was devised and executed by King Ferdinand, with the concurrence of the fallen Premier; and its motive was to give the Government a spurious air of reformation in the event of negotiations with the Allies. M. Malinov was a politician with an ambiguous record, having been by turns Russophil and Germanophil; his chief characteristic was that, whatever faction he belonged to, he kept a foot in the other camp. For honest politics there was scant hope in any class of the public men then flourishing in Bulgaria. Scarcely one but had subscribed to her wildest demands for territorial acquisitions in Greek and Serbian Macedonia; scarcely one but had affirmed with every emphasis of rhetoric his undying devotion to the cause of the Central Powers.

Yet in June, in spite of Germany's apparent triumphs in the West, Bulgaria was beginning to grow anxious. During the previous winter large sections of her population had been starving, for Germany had systematically plundered her of food-stuffs. Her



administration was corrupt and incapable; her army was on short rations, and ill supplied with boots and clothing. From January 1, 1918, Germany had ceased to pay the monthly subsidy, and from 1st March had refused to be responsible for munitions. Bulgaria looked with uneasy eyes on Turkey's new arrogance, which led her to defy Germany in her Transcaucasian policy; and the question of the Dobrudja was becoming rapidly a bone of contention between all the partners of the Teutonic League. By the Peace of Bucharest Constanza and the greater part of the Dobrudja had been placed under a *condominium* of Bulgaria's allies, and she could get no assurance that her will would ultimately prevail. She was quarrelling bitterly with Turkey over Thracian questions, and there also Germany seemed inclined to temporize with Constantinople. Bulgaria, herself skilled in political treachery, saw too clearly the signs of the same thing in her masters. She sought to establish her autocracy in the Balkans, but she had no desire to be herself a part of the greater autocracy of Berlin. Ferdinand, who dabbled in the classics, may have remembered the Roman historian's phrase: "*Germani sociis pariter atque hostibus servitudinem imposuerant.*" \* Above all, he was a shrewd observer, and judged rightly the weakness of Germany's whole position. So, while he was loud in his protestations of loyalty to the Teutonic League, in which all his Ministers joined, he was casting about for some cover should the skies fall. To quote again M. de Kallay's saying, he was looking for the cart filled with straw in case he might have to jump from the window. †

The Allied front in the Balkans had been all but stagnant since the futile offensive of May 1917. In December of that year the Commander-in-Chief, General Sarrail, who had shown little capacity, had been recalled, and his place taken by General Guillaumat, the former commander of the French Second Army. Throughout the early part of 1918 there had been a considerable readjustment of the Allied troops. Units had been withdrawn from the French and British commands for the front in the West, but the Italians had strengthened their force in Albania, and the new Greek Army had been so greatly increased that it represented the largest Allied contingent. On 30th May the troops raised by Venizelos showed their quality by attacking the Bulgarian positions just west of the Vardar, on a front of seven and a half miles, advancing one

\* "The Germans had imposed slavery on friend and foe alike." — Tacitus, *Hist.*, IV., p. 73.

† See Vol. II., p. 338.

and a quarter miles, and taking 2,000 prisoners. The movement was carried out by the Seres Division, which had the humiliation of Fort Rupel to avenge, and it gave them command of the Liumnitsa valley in which Ghevgeli stood.

In June, Franchet d'Esperey succeeded Guillaumat; and during the summer, by a number of local actions, the position of the Allied front was eased and strengthened. Meantime the *moral* of the Bulgarian forces was not improving, desertions were frequent, and a minor offensive planned to take place west of Lake Ochrida had to be postponed for this reason. During July the French and Italians moved south-west of Ochrida in the direction of Elbasan, their purpose being to straighten the front between the Adriatic and the lake. The important road junction of Berat was taken by the Italians, and over a thousand prisoners. The failure of the Austrian attack in Italy led to a steady activity by both sides in Albania. Towards the close of July an Austrian counter-attack drove General Ferrero back to Berat, thereby endangering the French on his right. Between 22nd and 26th August further counter-attacks retook Berat and forced Ferrero back some five miles to the Malakastra ridge, which was the last defence of the harbour of Valona. This withdrawal necessitated a further retreat of the French left wing. Thereafter, the Albanian front was quiet, and the interest of Europe in the Balkan battle-ground languished. Its difficulties were so notorious, the demands of other areas so urgent, that it was generally believed that the war would end with the opposing forces much in their present positions.

This expectation was to be dramatically reversed. The Allied High Command perceived that, so soon as Germany was gravely jeopardized in the West, there must come a weakening of the allegiance of her Eastern allies; for their hope of military support from her would be gone, and the bribes for which they had espoused her cause would become the most worthless of promissory notes. A vigorous attack upon Bulgaria and Turkey would, at its worst, complicate Germany's military problem, and at its best might put these discontented tributary states out of action. In the case of Bulgaria the best was scarcely to be hoped for, so formidable seemed her mountain defences. But a bold offensive might disintegrate her political unity, and bring to a head the dissatisfaction of her people and her armies with what promised to be a campaign of barren sacrifice.

The enemy front was held from left to right by the Bulgarian IV. Army, under Tochev, from the river Mesta to Lake Tahinos;

the Bulgarian II. Army, under Lukov, from Tahinos to Doiran; the Bulgarian I. Army, under Neresov, from Doiran to the bend of the Tcherná; the German XI. Army (Bulgarian in constitution, but with a German Staff and under the German general, Stoibel) from the Tcherná bend to the Skumbi valley; and an Austrian detachment in Albania. Facing it from east to west lay the British and Greeks east of the Vardar; the French and Serbians (the latter including Southern Slav regiments) between the Vardar and Monastir; an Italian detachment, under General Mombelli, west of Monastir; a further French contingent, and then Ferrero's Italians to the Adriatic. Of the total Allied forces, Greece supplied nine divisions, France eight, Serbia five, Britain four, and Italy, apart from her Albanian army, had one and a half divisions at Monastir. The enemy forces were some fifteen or sixteen divisions in line, which with reserves totalled 265 Bulgarian and three German infantry battalions, besides fourteen pioneer battalions and forty-eight cavalry squadrons. Germany was aware of the weakness of the front, but took no steps to remedy it. She was not averse to Bulgaria's suffering a local defeat, which might make her an easier ally to manage, and she seems, strangely enough, to have been convinced that the Greek army, when it came to fighting, would in large part desert to her side. But the gravest weakness lay not in inferiority of numbers and equipment, but in division of command. The Bulgarian II. and IV. Armies were under the Bulgarian commander-in-chief, Jekov, but the Bulgarian I. and the German XI. Armies were the group command of General von Scholtz.

The key to the Bulgarian front was Uskub, for, if that place were won, the communications would be cut between the two parts of the enemy force. An advance against it by the narrow trench of the Vardar valley was out of the question, and it could be taken only by a turning movement from the east or the west. On the east such an operation was impracticable, because of the great barrier of the main Balkan range running from west to east. On the west there was better hope, for there the ranges ran irregularly with a general direction of north to south. In the autumn of 1916 the Allies had taken Monastir; but their advance could not be continued, since east of the town was the great bend of the Tcherná, containing the Selechka Mountains, and while the enemy held these it was difficult to advance towards Prilep and the Babuna Pass, which led to Uskub. The first stage in any action must be to clear the Tcherná bend and the Selechka range.

Franchet d'Esperey resolved to make his attack, not from



Monastir, but from the east in the space between the Tcherná and the Vardar. In that area, north and north-east from Lake Ostrovo, the Allied front lay roughly along the Kaimakchalan and Dobropolye ranges, which formed the old Serbian frontier; but in certain vital parts the Bulgarians held the crest, and had created along the south slopes an apparently impregnable position. Franchet d'Esperey's plan was to take the enemy by surprise with an attack on a narrow front, and in the event of success to extend his area of assault on both flanks and make a push for the Tcherná. He argued that if he could carry the first and second Bulgarian lines on his side the river, the enemy's resistance might be so weakened as to permit of a real break through; for, though the Bulgarian communications were better than those of the Allies, they were fighting in a sense on exterior lines, and it might be possible by a swift advance to split their front. To puzzle the enemy as to the area of the main attack the British 27th Division on 1st September made a feint attack in the Vardar valley.

On Saturday, 14th September, the Allied guns bombarded heavily the line which ran north-east from Kaimakchalan. Early on the morning of Sunday the 15th, the Serbians, under Mishitch, with the French in their left, attacked the seven-mile front between Mount Sokol and Vetrenik, held by the Bulgarian 2nd Division. They were immediately successful. With a fury hoarded through two years of difficult waiting, the Serbs pressed up the steep hillsides, won the crest, and carried all the enemy's first line. The French were stayed for a time at the razor back of Sokol, but early on the 16th this was taken, and, according to plan, the front of attack was enlarged on both sides to some sixteen miles. That day the Allies went five miles forward, and through the enemy second lines; the Southern Slav Division fighting with the Serbs had reached the vital crest of Koziak, nearly 6,000 feet high, and were looking down on the affluents of the lower Tcherná; more than 3,000 prisoners and 24 guns had been taken at the expense of few Allied casualties. The right of the German XI. Army, which might have saved the situation by a counter-stroke, remained mysteriously supine, and presently paid the price of its impassivity.

It was one of those assaults the impetus of which grows with each mile of advance. On the 17th the Allies were twenty miles beyond their starting-point, and their front had stretched to a width of twenty miles. On the 18th the Serbians had reached and crossed the Tcherná, and were pushing towards Prilep by the eastern skirts of the Selechka Mountains, while their cavalry had

entered Poloshko, and their right wing was approaching the Vardar itself. A little more and the road and railway would be cut, which formed the immediate connection between the enemy's right and left armies. Meantime, the British and the Greeks facing the Bulgarian I. and II. Armies made certain that no reserves would be sent westward, for on the 18th they attacked east and west of Lake Doiran, while the Greek 1st Corps of three divisions pinned the enemy down on the Struma.

The Doiran battle was a hard struggle, for the enemy was prepared, and knew the place for the key of his whole front. General Milne had but two corps, the 12th and the 16th, both now fallen below one-half of their normal establishment. West of the lake lay the British 26th and 22nd Divisions, the Greek Seres Division, and a French regiment, the whole under Lieutenant-General Sir H. F. Wilson. East of the lake was the Cretan Division and the British 28th Division, both under the other corps commander, Lieutenant-General Sir C. F. Briggs. On the 18th the Allies won ground in both areas, but not their whole objectives. The height called the Grand Couronné, which had baffled us the year before, still repelled our efforts. On the 19th the attack was repeated, but still the front held. Meantime, to the west the whole line was in action from Monastir to the Vardar. The Serbians were across that river and far north of the Tcherná, and the enemy was retreating in complete disorder, burning the villages which he abandoned. By the 22nd the Bulgarian II. Army, which had made a gallant resistance, was compelled at last to fall back from the Doiran front, closely pursued by the British and the Greeks. By the night of the 23rd the Serbians were in Gradsko, and since the 15th had advanced forty miles — beyond doubt one of the major exploits of the campaign. The British and Greeks were pressing east of the Vardar, across the Belesh Mountains, towards the Strumnitza; the French were approaching Prilep; and Mombelli's Italians were moving north and east of Monastir into the Tcherná bend. Next day French cavalry entered Prilep, and found huge quantities of abandoned stores.

The Bulgarian position was now beyond hope. The direct communications of their armies were completely severed; more, their broken right wing had now but one way of retreat open — the road from Prilep by Kirchevo and Uskub. By the evening of the 25th the Serbians had the Babuna Pass and the town of Ishtip; they were close on Veles, and Uskub was almost within their grasp. The enemy front was cut in two, and the halves driven into a diver-

gent retreat. Its right wing, the German XI. Army, was being pressed north-east towards Kaikandelen. Its left wing, the I. and II. Bulgarian Armies, was pushed north to the Strumnitza, and the British\* had entered Bulgaria at Kosturino, a hundred miles south of Sofia. The Austrians in Albania had their flank in the air.

Moreover, the enemy was now making but a poor defence. The spirit had clearly gone out of him, and he was being flung from post to pillar at the Allies' will. He was manifestly beaten and demoralized, and he owed his condition partly to the gross mis-handling of the situation for the past year by Germany, which had weakened both the *moral* and the physique of his armies, and partly to the superior prowess of his opponents. The conduct of all sections of the Allied command had been exemplary, and especial mention should be made of the Greeks and the Serbians. Venizelos' new levies had behaved like veterans, and had shown a fighting quality scarcely revealed in their race since the great age of Hellas. As for the Serbians and the Southern Slavs, they had advanced with the patient and unrelenting fury of men who have to avenge a martyred people and a ruined land. They swarmed over precipitous mountains as if they had been level lawns; they broke through the strongest defences like steel through wax; by sheer indomitable courage they routed the enemy wherever and in whatever numbers they found him. The crumbling Teutonic League was faced by men who had already gone through the nether pit of suffering, and for whom nothing mortal had any terrors.

For Bulgaria the end had come. She saw no prospect of aid from her allies, and, now as ever a devotee of *realpolitik*, she resolved to make the best of a bad business. On the night of Thursday the 26th, a Bulgarian staff officer appeared under a flag of truce at the British Headquarters. Speaking on behalf of the Bulgarian Commander-in-Chief, he asked for a suspension of hostilities for forty-eight hours, to permit the arrival of authorized delegates to discuss the conditions of peace. Milne referred the request by telephone to Franchet d'Esperey, who refused the armistice but undertook to receive the delegates. On the evening of Saturday, the 28th, Lukov, Commanding the Bulgarian II. Army, the Bulgarian Minister of Finance, and M. Radev, the ex-Minister, arrived at Salonika, and next day were received by Franchet d'Esperey. They accepted without demur the Allied terms.

\* The Derbyshire Yeomanry, the leading troops of the 16th Corps, who had been brought from the right to the left of the Anglo-Hellenic Army.



These were: that the Bulgarian army should be immediately demobilized and its arms and equipment placed in Allied custody; that all Greek and Serbian territory at present occupied by Bulgaria should be at once evacuated; that all her means of transport, including her railways and her ships on the Danube, should be placed at the Allies' disposal; that she should cease to be a belligerent except with the Allies' consent; that her territory should be available for their operations, and that strategic points should be occupied by British, French, or Italian troops.\* On the morning of Monday, 30th September, these conditions were ratified by the Allied Governments. At noon the armistice was signed at Salonika, and Bulgaria ceased to be a participant in the war. Meantime, in the past few days the Allied armies had been sweeping forward. On the 27th the British took Strumnitza, and advanced north and east along the river valley. On that day the Serbians captured Veles, and on the 30th French cavalry entered Uskub. Farther to the west the French and Italians reached the Elbasan-Ochrida road, and in Albania Ferrero advanced and took Berat.

The news of Bulgaria's defection brought consternation to Berlin. At first the German view was that Malinov had engineered it without the consent of the king and the people; but this argument was speedily dropped when it became apparent that it was the people and the army who had forced the step, and that the views of Ferdinand mattered nothing. Then came brave talk of holding the Danube front, and the name of Mackensen was brought forward as a warning to check the Allied rejoicings. But Mackensen was in no position to help. He had four divisions in Rumania, and there were some thirty German and fourteen Austro-Hungarian divisions in Russia, much depleted and of poor quality. But the Central Powers were not so beloved on that front as to make it possible to send reinforcements to the Danube, and even if they could, they could not hope to check Franchet d'Esperey's advance. Germany had perforce to acknowledge defeat in that quarter, and do nothing.

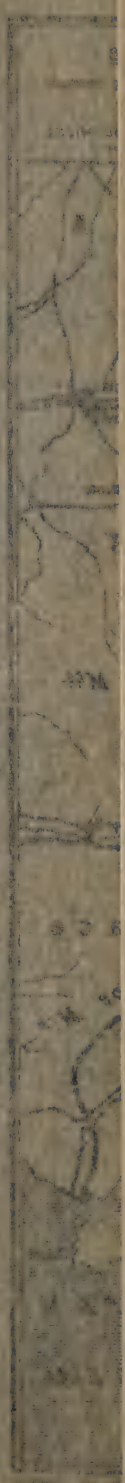
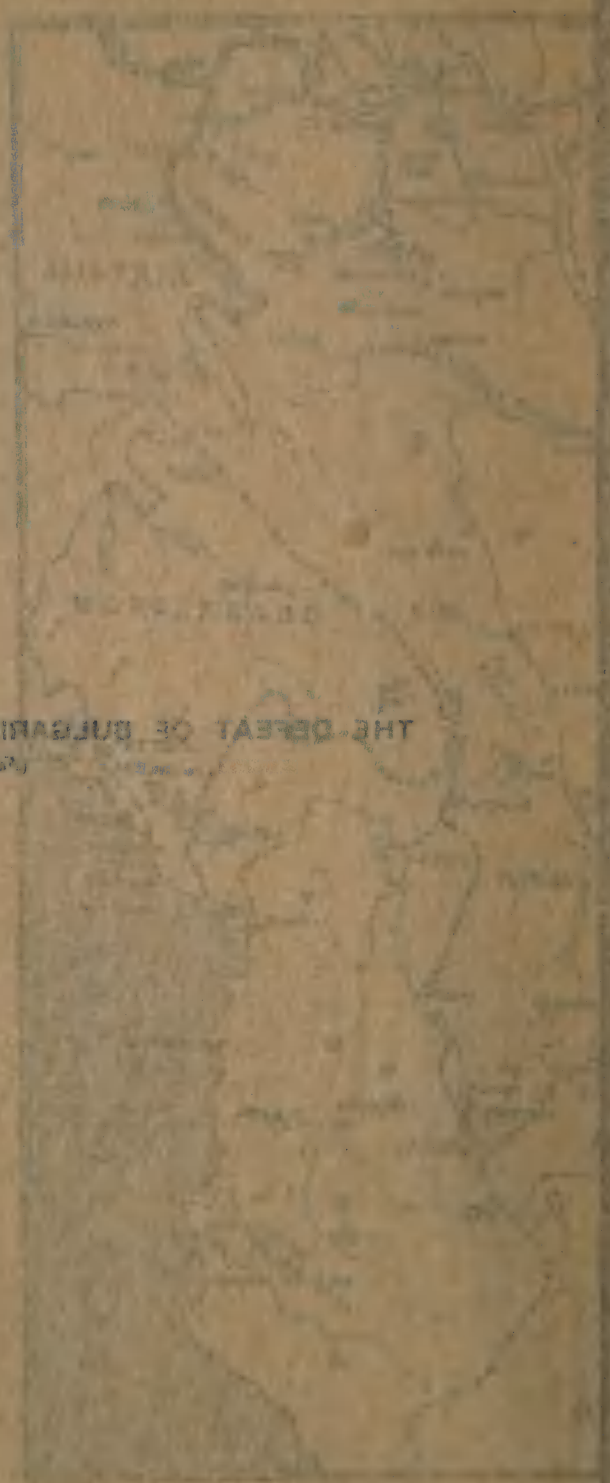
Events marched swiftly in the Balkans. On 4th October Ferdinand abdicated in favour of the Crown Prince Boris, and retired to his estates in Hungary. The new king issued a proclamation announcing that he would respect the constitution, and was "imbued with the spirit of democracy." The Allies advanced to the Danube, meeting with no resistance except from the broken Austro-German fragments now littered throughout Serbia. On 12th October the Serbians entered Nish, their ancient capital.

\* See Appendix, p. 445.



THE DEFEAT OF BULGARIA.

1918





There had been a brilliant naval raid on Durazzo by Italian and British cruisers on 2nd October; on the 7th the Italians occupied Elbasan, and on the 14th they took Durazzo. On the 19th, twenty-four days after the launching of the offensive, the Allies reached the Bulgarian shore of the Danube. By the end of the month the Serbians were in Belgrade, and the Balkan states south of the Danube and the Save were virtually cleared of the enemy.

The downfall of Bulgaria was such a *peripeteia* as rarely occurs in a campaign. In an area which had been, by almost universal consent, written down as incapable of producing a military decision, a heterogeneous Allied force moved against defences, elaborated during three years, in what was little more than an exploratory operation. There was no vital strategic objective within forty miles, and those miles were made up of precipitous mountains and unfordable rivers. Yet in three days the formidable enemy was in flight; in a fortnight he had made peace on terms of complete surrender; and in three weeks the Allied cavalry were watering their horses in the Danube. Bulgaria's power of resistance had decayed at the heart. The Salonika campaign, which for three years had seemed to be a fruitless divergent adventure, now found its justification, because the foundations of victory had been laid on the main front in Western Europe. The Central Powers had been since 1914 a beleaguered fortress, and it is in the way of such fortresses to fall suddenly. To the besiegers the walls look as stout as ever and the garrisons as alert, but they cannot read the hearts within; and lo! when they attack for the hundredth time with a somewhat weary resolution, the flag falls and the gates are opened.

Bulgaria had made little of her huckstering. Soured by the injustice of the old Treaty of Bucharest, and led by men without vision, she had deliberately chosen the path of the short view and the easy advantage. She had already paid a heavy toll in loss of men, in famine, and in a sordid bondage to Germany. She was now to pay the further penalty of surrendering her will as a nation and submitting humbly to justice. In her conduct of the war she had shown revolting brutality to Serbia and her Balkan neighbours; but on the whole she had behaved well to prisoners of the Western Allies, and, apart from her initial treachery, her record was less black than that of her colleagues. For one man there could be no pity. Her wretched king was one of the meanest figures that ever degraded a throne. He fled to his refuge beyond

the Danube, followed by the hatred of his subjects and the contempt of the civilized world.

The immediate military consequences of Bulgaria's surrender were enormous for the strategy of the war. The southern frontiers of Austria and Rumania were thrown open to an Allied invasion. The subject races of Austria-Hungary were put in a new position of vantage in their struggle for independence. Above all, the direct communications were cut between Germany and Turkey. No longer could the "Balkanzug" start from Berlin on its four days' journey to Constantinople. It was true that Germany, owing to her command of the Black Sea, could still keep in touch with the Bosphorus through South Russia and Rumania, and, though Turkey was now outflanked, she was not yet surrounded. Had Germany the will to send support, she still had the routes, provided that Turkey had the will to resist.

But Turkey was following fast upon Bulgaria's heels, and already that will had almost gone. For on 19th September Allenby had begun his amazing advance, and on the day when Bulgaria signed the capitulation he was already at the gates of Damascus.

## II

The capture of Jerusalem on December 9, 1917, left a curious situation. The Turkish Army was split into two parts, with its right wing holding a line curving south-east from about three miles north of Jaffa, and its left running in a semicircle north and east of Jerusalem astride the Nablus and Jericho roads, about six miles distant from the city. Between the two wings lay a patch of rocky hill country, with no lateral communications except those far in the rear. Clearly the next step in Allenby's campaign must be to push east of the Jordan and cut the Hedjaz railway, with the assistance of the Arab army from the south. But in that intricate campaigning ground an advance was impossible without careful preliminaries. When a move came it was swift and sudden, but it must be preceded by long preparation. His first care was to secure his advanced bases at Jaffa and Jerusalem, for the enemy was too close to both of them for comfort.

This work was performed during the last ten days of December. On the night of the 20th the 21st Corps, on the British left, began to move. The 52nd Division crossed the El Auja stream in spite of its swollen current, established its footing on the northern bank,

and next day constructed bridges and brought over its guns. On the 22nd the 54th Division, on the right, swung forward and took the villages of Rantieth and Fejja; while the 52nd passed beyond their objectives, and secured high ground that denied any observation over Jaffa harbour to the enemy. These operations drove the Turks eight miles from Jaffa, and gave the 21st Corps elbow-room. Meantime the task of the 20th Corps, on the British right, had been delayed by the wild weather of the week before Christmas. On the night of 26th December the enemy opened an attack astride the Jerusalem-Nablus road. The 60th Division bore the brunt of it; and an assault was also made on the line held by the 53rd Division north-east of Jerusalem. The two divisions held the enemy, and by noon of the 27th the 74th and 10th Divisions had counter-attacked, and driven in the Turkish right. That evening the enemy's attempt had wholly failed, and on the 28th the 20th Corps made a general advance northward. By the night of the 30th it had progressed on a twelve-mile front to a depth of from two to three miles. The result of the operations was that not only had the enemy attempt to retake Jerusalem been defeated, but the area held by the British around Jaffa and Jerusalem had been substantially increased, and their main line of lateral communication, the Jaffa-Jerusalem road, put out of danger.

Any further progress northward was out of the question till highways had been improved and the railway from the south brought nearer the front. Allenby's next step must be to secure his right flank by driving the enemy beyond the Jordan, a step which was necessary both as a preparation for a northern advance and to secure a starting-point for an attack upon the Hedjaz line. He had already made up his mind that his main advance, when the time came for it, would be by the coastal plain, and it was therefore his object to draw as much as possible of the enemy strength east of Jordan by capturing points which would threaten the security of the vital junction of Deraa. The land between Jerusalem and the Jordan valley was no easy country to operate in. It fell steeply in a succession of stony ridges and deep-cut glens to the great trench more than 1,000 feet below sea-level. The work was entrusted to the 60th and 53rd Divisions, and the Australian and New Zealand Mounted Division was for the time being attached to the 20th Corps. On February 19, 1918, the 6th Division advanced, and carried El Muntar, the most conspicuous crest among the ridges. Behind it the mounted troops were able to assemble in cover, and on the 20th Talaat ed Dumm was taken, which the Arabs call the Hill



of Blood. All day the two infantry divisions crept forward, and the cavalry assisted in a terrain such as cavalry has rarely operated in. At 8.20 on the morning of the 21st the Australians rode into Jericho, patrols were pushed forward to the banks of the Jordan, and the Turks retired across the river. It had been a difficult piece of work, performed through appalling country in the worst of weather. So impossible was the ground that one battery of field artillery took thirty-six hours to cover eight miles.

Allenby's right flank was now secure, but he must broaden his base before he could undertake an attack east of Jordan against the Hedjaz railway. He must seize the high ground on the north bank of the Wadi el Aujah, which enters the river north of Jericho, and thereby control the approaches by the road from Beisan; and he must push north of Jerusalem on both sides of the Nablus road so as to prevent the use by the enemy of all the northern routes to the lower Jordan valley. The 20th Corps was accordingly disposed in two parts. Its right wing endeavoured to secure the Jordan to a point north of the Wadi el Aujah; then came a gap which was sufficiently protected by the intricate nature of the country; beyond that its centre and left were directed along the Nablus road to the line Sinjil-Deir es Sudan. It was arranged that the 21st Corps should make a small movement to conform. The total advance contemplated was one of seven miles on a front of twenty-six. This stage in the operations began on 8th March. At first it went swiftly; but on the 9th resistance stiffened, and the 20th Corps had some heavy fighting before, on 11th March, it obtained its objectives. Next day the 21st Corps completed its share of the work. Allenby had won a strong defensive line, which protected his flank in any movement beyond the Jordan.

On 1st March Liman von Sanders took over from Falkenhayn the chief command in Palestine. He had been promised by Enver whole-hearted support and that no operation would be undertaken elsewhere; but Enver did not keep his word, and at the very moment was secretly planning an advance in the Caucasus. The new commander found the Turkish forces in poor condition, badly supplied, chronically short of drafts, and strategically ill-placed. The VIII. Army, under Djevad, was on the coastal plain; the VII., under Fevzi, lay astride the Jerusalem-Nablus road to the Jordan. East of the river was the IV. Army, entrusted with the defence of the Hedjaz railway, and with its units widely scattered. This last army was not under the direct command of Liman von Sanders, who was indeed utterly opposed to the whole railway defensive.

He would have concentrated everything against Allenby, and left Medina to its fate; as it was, the precarious undefined left wing must paralyze any serious strategy and dissipate such strength as remained in the Turkish forces.

The way had now been prepared for a serious attempt by Allenby on the Hedjaz railway, in conjunction with the Arab army from the south. The latter force, under Sherif Feisul, the son of the King of the Hedjaz, was based on Akaba, and since the beginning of the year had been pushing north up the Hedjaz line till it was within seven miles of Maan, while isolated detachments were well to the north-west of that place, and had raided and cut the railway. In the words of Colonel T. E. Lawrence, the process was to set up "ladders of tribes," giving a safe route from the sea-bases like Wejh and Akaba to the advanced bases of operation. Tafileh, fifteen miles from the south-east corner of the Dead Sea, had been taken by the Arabs, and held till enemy reinforcements reoccupied it in March. Allenby's first plan was for a raid on the line, which would damage it by the destruction of the viaduct and tunnel near Amman, and might, by forcing the recall of the Tafileh and Maan garrisons, open the way for Sherif Feisul.

Amman lay thirty miles north by east of Jericho. Beyond the Jordan was a mile or so of marsh and scrub; then clay ridges deeply cut by gullies; and beyond them the stony and swampy plateau of Moab. Amman itself lay in a pocket of the tableland, through which ran the Hedjaz line. The expedition, which was entrusted to the 60th Division, the Australian and New Zealand Mounted Division, the Imperial Camel Corps, and brigades of light-armoured cars and mountain artillery, started on the night of 21st March in a deluge of rain. Moving down the Valley of Achor, the troops found themselves faced with a river in roaring flood and severe Turkish fire from the scrub on the left bank. Swimmers managed to reach the farther shore with tow-ropes, and by 7.45 next morning the leading battalion had crossed. By 8.30 a bridge was completed, but it was not possible to enlarge the bridgehead so long as daylight lasted, owing to the violence of the enemy fire. Early on the morning of the 23rd a New Zealand regiment managed to cross, and, galloping northward, drove off the Turks from the bank. That day three bridges were built, and by 10 p.m. the 60th Division and most of the cavalry were east of the river.

On the 24th the 60th Division, working its way up the gullies, carried the position at Shunet Nimrin, which protected the pass

leading to Es Salt, and advanced four miles along the Amman road, while the mounted troops followed the tracks to Ain es Sir and Naaur. The weather was an unceasing downpour of rain; all wheeled transport had to be sent back, and the horses could barely keep their footing on the muddy slopes. The cavalry reached Naaur on the evening of the 25th and Ain es Sir on the morning of the 26th. The last dash for the railway now began, the Australians aiming at the line north of Amman, the New Zealanders at the line south of it, and the Imperial Camel Corps at Amman itself. By the evening of the 27th the New Zealanders reached the railway; but the Camel Corps was checked a mile west of Amman, and the Australians were also held, though one of their demolition parties blew up a bridge north of the town. On the 28th a brigade of the 60th Division came up, and a general attack was made on the Amman position, but without success. Things went no better next day, for the Turks had received reinforcements. At two in the morning of the 30th the attack was renewed; but since artillery could not be brought up, owing to the state of the roads, it was clear that success was impossible. Moreover, enemy forces from the north were threatening our rear at Es Salt, for the trans-Jordan advance had created an acute salient in the British front. Accordingly, Allenby withdrew his troops, and by 2nd April the whole force had recrossed the Jordan, except for a garrison left on the east bank to hold a bridgehead.

One result of the operations had been to concentrate all available Turkish troops, including part of the garrison of Maan, for the defence of Amman. This gave Sherif Feisul his opportunity. His patrols cut the Hedjaz line north and south of Maan, and on 13th April he carried Senna, and on the 17th the station of Maan itself. There, however, he was checked, and being short of ammunition, fell back on Senna. Meantime, he had made havoc of large sections of the railway both south and north of Maan.

The British withdrawal behind the Jordan allowed the Turks to reoccupy the strong Shunet Nimrin position, from which on 11th April they made heavy and futile attacks on our bridgehead. Allenby resolved to make a second raid into Gilead, to try and cut off the forces at Shunet Nimrin, which were some 5,000 strong, and to endeavour to hold Es Salt till Feisul could come up from the south, with the object of denying the enemy the use of the coming harvest. A brigade of the 60th Division was to attack at Shunet Nimrin, while a mounted force, consisting of the better part of the Desert Mounted Corps, was to move northward from



Ghoraniyeh to Es Salt, cut the communications of the enemy at Shunet Nimrin, and occupy Jisr ed Damieh in the north, from which the flank attack had come that compelled our previous retirement. The British movement anticipated by a narrow margin a Turkish attack designed to drive back Allenby from his most advanced position just west of the Jordan.

The operation began on 30th April, when the 60th Division captured the outworks at Shunet Nimrin, but could not carry the main position. The cavalry took Es Salt by the evening, and left an Australian brigade to guard its flank in the direction of Jisr ed Damieh. Early next morning, 1st May, this brigade was attacked by the 3rd Turkish Cavalry Division and part of the 24th Division, and was driven back with a considerable loss of guns and transport. This put the cavalry at Es Salt in an awkward predicament, for they were cut off from their base, since Shunet Nimrin had not fallen. Accordingly, it was arranged to attack the latter point again on 2nd May, the infantry of the 60th Division advancing from the west and the cavalry from Es Salt in the north-east. But on that day the cavalry had to fight a defensive battle at Es Salt, and so could give little assistance to the 60th Division, which made no headway. As the hoped-for Arab assistance had not been forthcoming, there was nothing for it but to withdraw. By the 4th of May the British troops, except for the bridgehead garrison, were again west of the Jordan. One principal result of these operations had been to convince the enemy that our plan of operation concerned the east of Jordan, with Deraa as a main objective. Liman strengthened the troops at Shunet Nimrin, and sent to Es Salt his chief reinforcement, the German 146th Regiment from Macedonia — which was precisely the consequence which the British commander desired. One-third of the enemy force was now east of Jordan.

For the time being Allenby had to hold his hand. The grave situation in Western Europe made it necessary for him to reorganize his forces, for all white troops that could be spared were ordered to France. Early in April the 52nd Division had gone, to be followed immediately by the 74th. Presently, nine regiments of Yeomanry left, ten more British battalions, and a number of siege batteries and machine-gun companies, and in May a further fourteen British battalions. To replace these losses the Indian 7th (Meerut) and 3rd (Lahore) Divisions arrived from Mesopotamia, and a number of Indian cavalry regiments and infantry battalions were dispatched from India — the result of the brilliant work in

reorganization performed by the Commander-in-Chief in India, Sir Charles Monro. In July and August a further batch of British battalions was replaced by Indian units. All this meant a reduction in fighting strength, and complicated provisions for readjustment and training. The summer could therefore witness no British offensive on a large scale.

Nevertheless, there was a good deal of activity. Between the 9th and 11th of April the 21st Corps on the British left advanced three miles on a front of twelve, taking among other places the village of Rafat. On 8th June they again attacked on the coast, and deprived the enemy of important observation points. During July and August there were many successful raids by Indian infantry and cavalry. In July the Turks, stiffened by German battalions, made a vigorous attempt to break into the British salient which had its apex at the Jordan bridgehead. On the 14th they attacked its northern flank at Abu Tellul, on the Jericho-Beisan road, and after a momentary success were driven out by the 1st Australian Light Horse Brigade, with a loss of 276 Germans, including 12 officers. A thrust at the same time against the Jordan bridgehead was anticipated and frustrated by the fine charge of an Indian cavalry brigade. During these months, too, the Turks failed to restore the Hedjaz line north and south of Maan, and Medina was definitely cut off from the north. Much of the summer was spent by Liman in quarrelling with Constantinople. He could not get adequate supplies, the dribble of drafts received scarcely balanced the increasing desertions, and he complained bitterly of Enver's breach of faith in the Caucasian adventure. In August he told Ludendorff that he might hold his own in the coastal plain, but that he was in the gravest danger east of Jordan, where a defeat would be fatal; yet he proposed to take the risk of standing his ground rather than embark on a lengthy retreat with troops whose *moral* was already shaken. The British strategy had been completely successful; the enemy had his mind centred upon his left wing.

The stage in the Palestine campaign just recorded was in the main a stage of preparation, intermediate between the brilliant advance on Jerusalem and the still more brilliant operations which were presently to bring Allenby to Damascus and Aleppo. It had been most arduous campaigning, owing partly to the drenching rains of the early spring, and partly to the natural difficulties of the Jordan trench and the hills of Moab. Of its immediate results let Allenby speak:—

"On 12th December the enemy still remained within four miles of Jerusalem. He is now twenty-two miles from the Holy City. To the east he has been driven across the Jordan, and his communications with the Hedjaz raided. His losses between December 12, 1917, and May 31, 1918, were considerable, the number of prisoners amounting to 330 officers and 6,088 other ranks. His one attempt on a large scale to assume the offensive and retake Jerusalem failed, and was turned into a defeat, accompanied by a considerable loss of territory."

We come now to what must rank among the most dramatic tales in the war, an exploit undertaken at the precise moment when its chances were brightest and its influence on the general strategy of the war most vital, perfectly planned, perfectly executed, and overwhelming in its success. The little campaign which began three years before on the banks of the Suez Canal had grown slowly to a major operation. In face of every difficulty the Allies had crept forward, first across the Sinai desert, then after long delays through the Turkish defences of the south, and then in a bold sweep to the gates of the Holy City. It had been always, so to speak, a campaign on sufferance, working only with the margin of strength which could be spared from the greater contest in the West. But it had moved patiently to its appointed end, for it was in the true tradition of those dogged older wars of Britain which had created her Empire. Her feet might be stayed for a season or retire, but in the long run they always moved forward. The Last Crusade was now approaching its climax, and the Crusaders would have startled the soul of St. Louis and Raymond and Richard of England could they have beheld that amazing army. For only a modest portion of it was drawn from the Western peoples. Algerian and Indian Moslems, Arab tribesmen, men of the thousand creeds of Hindustan, African negroes, and Jewish battalions were among the liberators of the sacred land of Christendom.

In September the Turks held a front from the coast north of Jaffa through the hills of Ephraim to a point half-way between Nablus and Jerusalem, and thence to the Jordan and down its eastern bank to the Dead Sea. On their left flank, at a considerable distance, the Arabs of Sherif Feisul were threatening the neighbourhood of Maan. The Turkish dispositions were, from west to east: the VIII. Army, under Djevad, comprising the 22nd and Asian Corps (the 7th, 20th, 19th, 16th, and 46th Divisions); the VII., under Fevzi, comprising the 3rd and 20th Corps (the 1st, 11th, 26th, and 53rd Divisions); and, east of the Jordan, the IV., under Kutchuk Djemal, which included the 2nd and 8th Corps



(the 28th and 62nd Divisions). All these units were greatly below establishment. With a ration strength of over 100,000, they had in line only some 32,000 rifles, 4,000 sabres, and 400 guns, and the garrison of Maan and the posts on the Hedjaz railway gave them a further 6,000 rifles and 30 guns. Their general reserve was small — 3,000 rifles and 30 guns, distributed between Tiberias, Nazareth, and Haifa. Against this force Allenby had two divisions of cavalry, two mounted divisions, seven infantry divisions (the Meerut, Lahore, 53rd, 54th, 10th, 60th, and 75th — the British divisions having now a large admixture of Indian troops), an Indian infantry brigade, four extra battalions, and the equivalent of a French infantry brigade — a total of 12,000 sabres, 57,000 rifles, and 540 guns. The situation had been reversed since the days of Gaza. Moreover, Liman von Sanders' command had behind it a record of failure; and above it, as above the whole Teutonic League, the skies had darkened.

It was in the Allied interest to strike soon, for beyond the enemy front lay the plains of Sharon and Esdraelon, which would become swamps with the first winter rains. Allenby's strategic plan could not be in doubt. It was difficult to join hands with Feisul if the communications of any force east of the Jordan were liable to be cut by the enemy transferring troops from the west to the east bank, and this danger remained so long as the Turks controlled the crossing at Jisr ed Damieh. If, however, the enemy west of the Jordan were defeated, this obstacle would be removed, and the IV. Army east of the river must either retreat or be isolated. The communications of the VII. and VIII. Armies were very imperfect, running mainly through Beisan to Damascus. This meant that the VIII. Army, on the enemy's right, had no direct communication (all the routes trending north-east by El Afule and Beisan to the junction of the Palestine and Hedjaz lines at Deraa) except by the road along the western shore of the Sea of Galilee. Now, behind the Turkish front lay the hills of Samaria, stretching to the sea at Mount Carmel, and beyond these the plains of Esdraelon and the valley of Jezreel. If, therefore, the front of the VIII. Army could be broken and our cavalry sent through, they might ride over the coastal Plain of Sharon, cross the hills, and reach Esdraelon and Jezreel before the enemy could make good his retreat. Once El Afule and Beisan were in our hands, the VIII. and VII. Armies would be cut off; and if Deraa, east of the Jordan, could be reached by Feisul, the Turkish armies would cease to exist. Allenby, therefore, determined to thin his front elsewhere, and

concentrate his energies on breaking up the VIII. Army in the Plain of Sharon and opening a road for the cavalry. He was playing not for a local success, but for final victory, and he was preparing to use his cavalry as that arm had not been used since the outbreak of war.

He made his dispositions with extreme care. Opposite the VIII. Army was the British 21st Corps, under Lieutenant-General Sir Edward Bulfin, now comprising the Lahore, Meerut, 54th, 60th, and 75th Divisions, the French detachment and the 5th Australian Light Horse Brigade. Behind it lay the Desert Mounted Corps under Lieutenant-General Sir Harry Chauvel, waiting to exploit its success. The 20th Corps, under Lieutenant-General Sir Philip Chetwode, lay astride Nablus road and along the Jordan valley. It now contained only two infantry divisions (the 53rd and the 10th), and most of the cavalry had gone to Bulfin's area. In order to screen their departure, Major-General Sir Edward Chaytor, with the Australian and New Zealand Mounted Division and various other infantry and cavalry units, was ordered to demonstrate eastward, as if an attack were contemplated beyond the Jordan. This led the enemy to keep the IV. Army in position, and to refrain from strengthening his threatened right wing. Finally, a mobile Arab column, under Feisul, supported by a French mountain battery and British armoured cars, assembled fifty miles east of Amman for the advance on Deraa. Our complete pre-eminence in the air prevented the Turkish aircraft from detecting these preparations, and four-fifths of the British force was concentrated on one-fifth of the total front without a suspicion of the truth reaching the enemy. When our attack was launched, it fell everywhere with the shock of an utter surprise.

At 4.45 on the morning of Thursday, 19th September, the 21st British Corps made its attack, its dispositions being, from left to right, the 60th Division, the Meerut, the 75th, the Lahore, the 54th, and the French detachment. Progress on the right in the foothills was necessarily a little slow, but the centre and the left, in the Plain of Sharon, swept clean through the enemy's defences. His first positions, held by the Turkish 7th and 20th Divisions, fell at once. Presently the 60th Division were at the Nahr Falik (the stream by the side of which, in September 1191, Cœur de Lion's English horsemen won their great victory), and were wheeling to the right against Tul Keram, leaving the coast road clear for the cavalry. By 11 a.m. the 75th Division, after a harder fight, had taken the ridge of Et Tireh, and the Lahore Division had taken

Jiljulieh (Gilgal), and were pressing into the foothills. The VIII. Army was in utter rout, pouring along the roads to Nablus and Messudieh, desperately harassed by our airmen and mounted troops, while the main body of our cavalry was riding for Esdraelon to cut them off in rear.

That night Chetwode advanced with his 20th Corps to close the roads leading to the lower Jordan valley. The Turkish VII. Army fought well, but the 53rd and 10th Divisions that night and the next day slowly pressed forward towards Nablus. On the 20th Bulfin, with the 21st Corps, moved through the mountains of Samaria, and by the evening reached the line Bakka-Beit Lud-Massudieh Station-Attara. The enemy's resistance was appreciably stiffening in that difficult country, and he was showing something of his traditional tenacity in defence. He did not realize that already his doom was sealed.

For the cavalry had completely fulfilled their task. By noon on the 19th their leading troops were eighteen miles north of the old front line, and wheeling north-east towards Esdraelon and Jezreel. That afternoon they were through the last barrier of the Samaritan hills. By 5.30 a.m. on the morning of the 20th the 13th Brigade of the 5th Cavalry Division, which in less than twenty-four hours had ridden fifty miles, had reached Nazareth, and taken 2,000 prisoners, including part of the staff of Liman von Sanders, who only escaped by the skin of his teeth.\* That night the 4th Cavalry Division reached Beisan, eighty miles from its starting-point, and seized the railway bridge over the Jordan, while the Australian Mounted Division took Jenin, and so closed the last outlet from the south. In thirty-six hours the trap had been shut. The 21st Corps held the line Samaria-Attara, the 20th Corps the high ground north-east of Nablus and Mount Ebal, and the cavalry the whole hinterland to the north. Between them lay the remnants of the Turkish VIII. and VII. Armies, with no possible way of escape except by the roads south-east to the Jordan crossing at Jisr ed Damieh.

Every track was choked with the rout, camps and depots were in flames, and British airmen steadily bombarded each section of the retreat. At 1.30 on the morning of the 22nd the New Zealand Mounted Rifles Brigade, and the West Indian battalions from Chaytor's force, seized the crossing at Jisr ed Damieh, and deprived

\* The brigade was too weak to occupy the whole town, and had to retire. Liman got most of his headquarters away by the Tiberias road, and himself left after midday.



the two Turkish armies of their last hope of retreat. They were being relentlessly driven by the Allied infantry into the arms of the cavalry. It remained only to reap the fruits of success. By the 24th the two armies had for the most part passed into our hands, with such of their stores as remained undestroyed. Meantime, while the 4th Cavalry Division and the Australian Mounted Division were collecting the fragments, the Desert Mounted Corps occupied Haifa and Acre, for it was necessary to clear the coast route as soon as possible to provide bases for the next advance.

There now remained of all Liman's forces only the IV. Army, east of the Jordan. Till the third day of the battle it had shown no signs of moving, though the west bank of the river was falling steadily under our power. On the morning of the 23rd it began its retreat towards Es Salt and Amman, closely pursued by Chaytor's horsemen, and ruthlessly bombed from the air. That night the New Zealanders entered Es Salt, and two days later Amman fell. Maan had meantime been evacuated. Chaytor and Feisul had now joined hands, and the Arabs pressed the fleeing Turks northward along the Hedjaz railway. Chaytor remained at Amman to intercept the retreat of the 2nd Turkish Corps from the Hedjaz, and on the 28th duly added that unit to the list of captures.

The game was wholly in Allenby's hands. His next step was to move on Damascus, and so intercept what was left of the Turkish IV. Army in its northward flight. It is likely that the bulk of that army might have reached Damascus in time to organize a defence, had it not been delayed by the brilliant destructive work done on the railway by Colonel Lawrence and his Arab Camel Corps — performances which for ingenuity and audacity recall some legend of the *Arabian Nights*. Chauvel and the Desert Mounted Corps were ordered to advance in two columns, one by the south end of the Sea of Galilee and Deraa, the other round the north end by Capernaum and El Kuneitra. On the 25th Tiberias was occupied, and the Australian Mounted Division concentrated there. On the afternoon of the 25th the 4th Cavalry Division moved out of Beisan on its 120-mile ride, and the Australians left the following day by the northern route. The left-hand column had a stiff fight at the crossing of the Jordan, and again at El Kuneitra; but they made good progress round the skirts of Mount Hermon, and by 10 a.m. on the 30th were twelve miles south-west of Damascus. The right-hand column had meantime gained touch at Er Remte with the Arab forces, whose vanguards by the 27th had entrenched themselves seventeen miles north of Deraa, across the line of the

Turkish retreat. Early that morning Lawrence's Arab Camel Corps entered Deraa, and the next day the 4th Cavalry Division and the Sherifian troops pushed northward. On the 30th the Australian Mounted Division had closed all the northern and north-western exits from Damascus, and the 5th Cavalry Division lay in the southern outskirts. At six in the morning of 1st October Feisul and Chaytor entered the city.\*

It was the twelfth day from the opening of the attack. Three Turkish armies had melted away, over 60,000 prisoners and between 300 and 400 guns were in Allenby's hands, and the dash for Damascus had destroyed the faintest expectation of an enemy stand. All that remained was a mob of 17,000 Turks and Germans, of whom perhaps 4,000 were effectives, fleeing north without discipline or purpose. Of the many brilliant episodes of those marvellous twelve days, perhaps the most brilliant was the converging movement of Chauvel's Desert Corps and Feisul's Arabs on the most ancient of the world's cities. Damascus had been an emporium when Tyre was young, and she was still a mighty city centuries after Tyre had become a shadow. Rich in holy places — for is it not on that minaret called the "Bride" of her great Mosque that, according to popular belief, the Lord will take His stand at the Day of Judgment? — she had one shrine of peculiar interest for this last Crusade. Within her walls lay the tomb of Saladin, the greatest of those who fought in Palestine the battle of Asia against Europe. One of Feisul's first acts was to remove the tawdry bronze wreath with which the German Emperor, in 1898, had seen fit to decorate the sleeping-place of the great Sultan.

Allenby did not rest upon his laurels. His next objective was the line Rayak-Beirut, for he wanted a port and a railway running inland, to shorten his communications. On 6th October Rayak was occupied without trouble by the Desert Mounted Corps, and the junction with the broad-gauge line to Aleppo was won. Meantime the Meerut Division had been marching north along the coast from Haifa through Tyre and Sidon, and on the 8th occupied Beirut amid the plaudits of the inhabitants. The rest was a triumphal procession. The Desert Corps reached Baalbek on the 11th, and, riding down the valley of Orontes, took Homs on the 15th. The Meerut Division, following the coast, occupied Tripolis on the 18th, thereby providing a shorter supply line for the cavalry at Homs.

\* A detachment of the Australian Light Horse Regiment reached the Serail at 6.30 a.m.; Colonel Lawrence and the Camel Corps came a little later. Chauvel entered at 8.30 a.m.

# ALLENBY'S ADVANCE TO DAMASCUS.

(Facing p. 358.)





ALLEBY'S ADVANCE TO DAMASCUS.

(From A. 100)



The next and last stage was Aleppo, that great mart through which, in the Middle Ages, the wealth of Asia flowed to Venice and the West. The 5th Cavalry Division and the armoured cars were sent forward, and after a few small brushes with the enemy, reached the place on the 25th, where they were joined by an Arab detachment. Next day the town was cleared and occupied, Liman von Sanders having retired to Alexandretta. Our cavalry patrols advanced fifteen miles and occupied Muslimie Junction, thereby cutting the Bagdad railway. Since 19th September the Allies had moved their front 300 miles to the northward. They had taken over 75,000 prisoners and huge quantities of stores. They had entirely destroyed the Turkish armies in Syria, and driven the enemy back behind the Cilician Gates. They had cut, too, the much-prized line which was to link Berlin with the Persian Gulf. The Turkish Empire, and all the hopes that Germany had built on it, were crumbling under the deadly pressure from the south.

It was the moment for Marshall to move in Mesopotamia. One British column advanced up the Tigris, and another along the Kifri-Kirkuk-Altun Keupri road. The left column, under Lieutenant-General Sir A. S. Cobbe, drove the Turkish force on the Tigris steadily back, cut off its retreat by means of an enflanking cavalry movement, and on the 30th October, near Sherghat, compelled its surrender. It numbered 7,000 men, under its general, Ismail Hakki. In the meantime the right-hand column had taken Kirkuk on the 25th and advanced to Altun Keupri. The resounding events in Syria had weakened the enemy resistance everywhere, and its echoes were heard in Persia and Transcaspia. Mosul was now within General Marshall's reach, but when he entered it in the first days of November it was without opposition. For Turkey, like Bulgaria, had followed the path of wisdom, and surrendered to the Allies.

On the 3rd of July the Sultan Mohammed V. died. He was an old and feeble man at his best, and had never been more than a puppet in the hands of the Committee of Union and Progress. His successor — his brother, Mohammed VI. — had not been many weeks on the throne before he gave signs of some independence of character. The estrangement between Enver and Talaat was increasing, and as Germany's prospects darkened in the West the policy of *saue qui peut* began to have supreme attractions for Turkey's governors. The defection of Bulgaria, and Allenby's

exploits in Syria, gave impetus to the movement. On 10th October Enver and Talaat resigned. On the 11th Izzet, an honest soldier, succeeded Enver at the War Office, and Tewfik, a colourless ex-diplomat, became Grand Vizier. Djavid remained Minister of Finance, and the constitution of the Government suggested that though Enver might have fallen, Talaat was still active behind the scenes, and the Committee still the repository of the supreme power.

But the situation was too serious to be met by any juggling with Cabinet appointments. Turkey's end was near, and the blindest of the Young Turks was constrained to admit the truth. The British and French were at the Maritza and marching on Adrianople, and a Greek corps was moving between Kavala and Drama. Presently the enemy from the west would be at the gates of Stamboul. On the 14th October Turkey appealed to President Wilson to use his influence to secure an armistice and to begin negotiations for peace. To this the President sent no reply, and Constantinople could not afford to wait. General Townshend, who had been a prisoner since the fall of Kut, was released, and sent to the headquarters of Admiral Sir Somerset Calthorpe, commanding the British naval forces in the Ægean, to ask that negotiations should be immediately opened for an armistice. Admiral Calthorpe stated the conditions on which this would be granted, and during the last week of October the Turkish plenipotentiaries arrived at Mudros. On the 30th an armistice was signed, and from noon on the 31st hostilities ceased. The main terms were the opening of the Dardanelles and the Black Sea, the immediate repatriation of Allied prisoners, the demobilisation of the Turkish Army, the severing of all relations with the Central Powers, and the placing of Turkish territory at the disposal of the Allies for military purposes.\*

The surrender of Turkey brought to an end the hopes of the Teutonic League of using gains in the East to redress the balance in the West. It shattered the whole fabric of policy built up laboriously during the past four years between the Baltic and the Indian Ocean. It left Germany with no crutch to lean on but her Western armies. We turn now to that battlefield where, long before Turkey signed the armistice, the fate of those armies had been decreed.

\* See Appendix, p. 446.



## CHAPTER XCIX

### THE BREAKING OF THE GERMAN DEFENCES

*September 25—October 10, 1918*

The German Position on 25th September—The American Attack on the Meuse—Haig breaks through Hindenburg Line—The Belgian Advance—The Arpeggio of the Allied Armies—The British in Open Country—The Fall of Cambrai.

ON the 25th of September the Germans between the North Sea and the Moselle held a position difficult, indeed, but not hopeless. They still possessed many of the chief points of vantage in the West—the Ypres ring of hills, the Wytschaete-Messines ridge, the St. Gobain *massif*, the main part of the Aisne heights, the uplands about Rheims, and a strong line protecting the road down the Meuse valley. They had the water-line in front of Douai, and the Siegfried system still intact, covering Cambrai and St. Quentin; while its extension, the Hunding and Brunehilde zones, defended the country between the Oise and the Aisne and the positions in Champagne. Their worst anxiety was on behalf of their left, for at all costs the Allies must be warded off Mezières and Longuyon and the vital railway of the south. There, accordingly, Ludendorff had strengthened his forces, for he believed that the American attack at St. Mihiel would be followed by an advance into Lorraine. His second main preoccupation was his centre from Douai to St. Quentin. He could not afford to lose Cambrai, because it was the road and railway junction which supplied the Siegfried zone, and he had some cause for nervousness, since in front of it was a gap in the water defences. The Siegfried zone itself must be maintained, for behind it lay the great railway from Lille by Valenciennes and Hirson to Mezières, on which his position was based. If this were breached his whole battle plan would be in ruins.

Therefore he laboured to keep his left and centre at maximum strength, for, in spite of his experiences in August and September, he could not conceive the possibility of an assault by the Allies on every section.\*

The dispositions of the opposing forces on the eve of the final struggle were these. — The German group commands remained as before — Prince Rupprecht on the right, Boehn and the Imperial Crown Prince in the centre, and Gallwitz on the left. From the north the order of their armies was as follows: the IV., under Armin, from the sea to the Lys; the VI., under Quast, to a point north of Arras; the XVII., under Otto von Below, in front of Douai and Cambrai; the II., still under Marwitz, but about to pass under Carlowitz, to St. Quentin; the XVIII., under Hutier, astride the Oise; the VII., under Eberhardt, north of the Aisne; the I., under Mudra, north of Rheims; the III., under Einem, in Champagne; the V., presently to be under Marwitz, north of Verdun; and, covering Longuyon and Metz, a special detachment, under Fuchs. The Allied forces from left to right were: the Belgians north of Ypres; the British Second Army, under Plumer, to the Lys; the new British Fifth Army, under Sir William Birdwood, in front of Lens and Lille; the British First Army, under Horne, opposite Douai; the British Third Army, under Byng, before Cambrai; the British Fourth Army, under Rawlinson, to St. Quentin; the French First Army, under Debeney, to the Oise; the French Tenth Army, under Mangin, on the Ailette and the heights of the Aisne; the French Fifth Army, under Berthelot, in front of Rheims; the French Fourth Army, under Gouraud, in Champagne, west of the Argonne; and the American First Army, under Pershing, from the Argonne across the Meuse to a point north of Nancy.

The Allied Commander-in-Chief had compelled Ludendorff to conform to his will, and to make his chief concentration within the outermost bend of the great salient, leaving much of the rest very weak, in spite of all efforts at reinforcements. The German High Command was in this dilemma: they had two sections of acute importance, Lorraine and the Siegfried zone, and with shrinking forces both had to be maintained against an opponent with far greater strength in guns and men. Defeat in either quarter would

\* Ludendorff's Memorandum of 14th September (printed in German White Book, *Vorgeschichte des Waffenstillstands*, issued July 31, 1919) shows that he had still considerable hopes of the military position, and was not prepared to talk of peace except upon terms advantageous to Germany.

be fatal, but the defences of both were still strong. Ludendorff pinned his faith to the seven miles of the Siegfried system and the masked and tortuous terrain through which the Meuse flowed to Mezières.

Foch made his plan cunningly, so as to exploit every weakness in the enemy's position. He instructed Pershing to extend the left of the American First Army to La Harazée in the Argonne, and to be ready with nine divisions in line on the front west of the Meuse. He aimed at striking almost simultaneously against each of the danger points. Pershing, with Gouraud on his left, would attack down the Meuse in the direction of Mezières, so that if he succeeded, the enemy would be forced back towards the Ardennes. At the same moment other French armies would press towards Laon and Hirson, and the British would attack the Siegfried zone, break through it, and cut the main German communications. Simultaneously the Belgians and the British left would advance in the north, where the enemy was weak, in the direction of Ghent, so as to clear the Belgian coast and complicate any retirement. The strategy was that of a general pressure on all parts of the salient, and the vital elements were the attacks of Pershing and Gouraud in the south and of Haig in the centre. For, if the first made retreat imperative, and the second destroyed the machinery of retreat, a comprehensive disaster must follow. In this scheme the Americans and the British were cast for the most difficult rôles. The course of the first lay through a desperate country, partly the wooded upland of the Argonne, where little impression had been made on the enemy's defence since the first months of war, partly among the blind hollows lying east towards the Meuse. There lay the formidable Kriemhilde positions, and there the enemy would thicken his troops at the first move. The problem of the British was, if possible, more intricate. They had to attack in the area where the enemy's defences were already most highly organized and his forces were strongest. If the Siegfried zone held, the German *moral* might well recover and a new era of resistance open. Nor should it be forgotten that Haig's armies had borne the heaviest share of the summer fighting, and that every division had been sorely tried. Yet the attempt must be made, for it was the essential part of the whole strategy, and the measure of the difficulties was the measure of the honour in which Foch held the fighting quality of his British and American allies.

It is necessary to emphasize the importance of the task allotted to the British forces, for it sets in high relief the courage and insight



of the British Commander-in-Chief. So difficult seemed the operation of breaking at one bound through the Siegfried Line, that the British Government endeavoured for some weeks to dissuade Sir Douglas Haig from the attempt. Their nervousness was natural, but the responsibility thus placed upon their Commander-in-Chief might well have dismayed a weaker man. The movement was undertaken on Haig's initiative; he bore the sole burden of it; and therefore to him belongs the full credit of what was destined to be one of the decisive actions of the war. He had made Foch's strategy his own, and the two men wrought as if with a single mind, so that it is hard to say from which came the first origination of certain of the details. Foch's earlier plan, for example, had been to direct the Americans on Briey; it was Haig who advised against eccentric attacks, and urged the advance down the Meuse. The latter's judgment was as unerring as his resolution was unshakable. The British War Office was fixed in the opinion that the war could not end before July 1919; but on 9th September Haig told Lord Milner that the conflict had changed its character, and was on the eve of a decision.

Foch resolved to begin on his right flank, where the enemy was waiting for the expected thrust towards Metz, while the main American strength had been moved to the left bank of the Meuse. There he hoped for a surprise, though he was aware of the strength of the Kriemhilde defences. If Pershing could push far enough down the Aire he would turn the flank of the whole enemy position on the Aisne, against which Gouraud would be pressing from the south. The American Commander had three corps in line — from left to right, General Bullard's 3rd Corps (33rd, 80th, and 4th Divisions), General Cameron's 5th Corps (79th, 37th, and 91st Divisions), and General Liggett's 1st Corps (35th, 28th, and 77th Divisions) — a rifle strength of some 108,000 men in front line. In reserve were the 1st, 3rd, 29th, 32nd, 82nd, and 92nd Divisions. On the night of Wednesday the 25th the Americans opened artillery fire on the east bank of the Meuse, as if an attack were coming in that quarter. Then followed a bombardment of the enemy back areas, everywhere between the Suippe and Verdun. At 2.30 on the morning of the 26th, in a cold, wet fog, the guns of Gouraud and Pershing began the severest kind of "preparation," and at 5.30, on a front of forty miles, the infantry of the two armies crossed the parapets.

The first rush took Gouraud's six corps of attack through the front positions, which had been ceaselessly strengthened ever since

the Champagne battle of September 1915. Places famous in that action fell into his hands — Navarin Farm, Tahure and the Buttes de Tahure, Souain, and Mesnil. His average advance was some three miles for he was operating in most difficult country, that series of long, low ridges, each of which was tunnelled and fortified to the last degree of elaboration. His attack was a complete surprise; and by the evening he had broken the back of a position which Einem had thought impregnable. Pershing had, to begin with, the easier task, and his progress was more rapid, for before night fell he had put six miles of enemy ground behind him. He swept over the Forges brook, and into the region of wooded hills, not yet desecrated like those of Verdun. The Americans, fighting with superb dash and resolution, took Malancourt and Danneveux, Epinonville, Cheppy, and Varennes; they were held up for a little by machine-gun fire from Montfaucon, but before noon next day the 79th Division carried the place. In Montfaucon they had won the commanding observation point of the whole district, from which, in the old battles at Verdun, the fire of the German heavy guns had been directed. The Volker line, the advance guard of the Kriemhilde position, had been reached and in two places pierced. Gallwitz hurried every man he could spare to stop this breach, for he argued correctly that Gouraud's advance was a containing battle, and that the Americans were the spearhead. There was no German general reserve, so he had to borrow troops where he could from other parts of the front. But it seemed wise to borrow them, for Foch was clearly directing his main effort on the Meuse.

Next day the enemy knew more of Foch's mind, which thought in terms not of isolated thrusts, but of linked and cumulative actions. For that day, Friday, 27th September, Haig struck towards Cambrai. To appreciate the importance of the stroke it is necessary to sketch the nature of the Siegfried zone, before which were drawn up the armies of Horne, Byng, and Rawlinson. Its northern limit was the southern end of the water-line which protected Douai. North and south of Mœuvres the enemy had the Canal du Nord as an extra defence to cover that gap between the water-line and the Scheldt Canal, which offered an avenue of approach to Cambrai. But the strongest part of the zone was opposite Rawlinson's front, between St. Quentin and Bantouzelle, where the Scheldt Canal formed the outworks of the system. The principal German trenches were on the east bank, but on the west bank lay advanced posts skilfully sited, so as to deny the attack effective artillery

positions. The canal gave cover for resting troops and shelter to the garrisons of the outpost line during a bombardment. The configuration of the whole section was most curious. From Vendhuile south to Bellicourt the canal passed through a tunnel 6,000 yards long, which was connected by shafts with the trenches above. North of Vendhuile the canal lay in a deep cutting, the sides of which were honeycombed with dug-outs, and the edges studded with armoured machine-gun emplacements. From Bellicourt south to Bellenglise the cutting became shallow, till at the latter place the canal was almost on the ground level, while south of Bellenglise it was dry. From Bellicourt southward the enemy had two heavily wired trench lines, nearly a mile west of the canal, while north of Vendhuile his positions were on the east bank. These were, so to speak, the outpost and battle zones of the system; but it ran back for a distance of from five to seven miles, a belt of country containing many subsidiary lines and numerous fortified villages, and culminated in what was known as the Beau-revoir-Fonsomme line, a double row of trenches analogous to the front position. East of that there was open country.

Haig had selected the southern section between Vendhuile and Holnon, held by Rawlinson's Fourth Army, as the main area of attack. But there the Siegfried defences were at their strongest, and a long "preparation" was necessary. He therefore decided to attack first with the First and Third Armies from Vendhuile north to the water-line, in order to puzzle the enemy as to the quarter in which the chief blow would be delivered, and to enable the two armies to get forward so as to simplify Rawlinson's task. On the night of the 26th a heavy bombardment opened between St. Quentin and the Sensée. The night was very wet, but before dawn the clouds departed, leaving clear air and a rain-washed sky. At 5.20 a.m. on the 27th, just as light was breaking, Byng and Horne advanced on a front of thirteen miles, between Gouzeaucourt and Sauchy-Lestrée. The dispositions from right to left were the 4th, 6th, 17th, and Canadian Corps. The key of the problem was the debouchment on a narrow front in the Mœuvres area, for the Canal du Nord north of that place was too strong to be passed in the face of the enemy. But if the canal could be crossed there, the northern sector might be turned by an attack fanning out from the bridgehead. This task was entrusted to the 52nd and 63rd Divisions, and the 4th and 1st Canadians.

Just at dawn these divisions stormed the canal, and swung forward on Graincourt, Anneux, and Bourslon — the storm centre



of the first battle of Cambrai — while our engineers built bridges in their rear. At Graincourt there was a stubborn fight; but the 63rd Division took the place by the evening, while the 4th Canadians took Bourslon, and the 3rd Canadians Bourslon Wood. On their right the 57th and 52nd Divisions were east of Anneux, and close upon Fontaine-Notre-Dame. Farther south the Guards and the 2nd Division made good progress, and the 31st Division took Ribécourt and Flesquières, while on their right the 5th and 42nd Divisions had established a flank between Ribécourt and Beaucamp. In the left centre the 1st Canadians and the 11th Division had taken Sains-lez-Marquion, Haynecourt, and Epinoy, and on the extreme left the 25th Division was across the canal and moving on Palluel. That evening we had taken over 10,000 prisoners and 200 guns; we were everywhere across the Canal du Nord and were close on the Scheldt Canal south of Cambrai.

Next day Gouzeaucourt fell, and Marcoing and Fontaine-Notre-Dame, and at Marcoing we reached the east bank of the Scheldt Canal, while farther north we were in Saily and Palluel and Aubencheul-au-Bac. Cambrai was now menaced on two sides, and the defences of the gap had been destroyed. The great road-and-rail junction was out of action, and Douai was also threatened by the turning of its water-line on the south. Worse still, the crossing of the Canal du Nord by tanks, and the passing of the Scheldt Canal at Marcoing, had broken Ludendorff's confidence in his outer Siegfried defences. He was now engaged hotly in two vital areas, and, having no general reserves, and being unwilling to take troops from Rawlinson's front, he could look only to the St. Gobain and Aisne sections, and to the already thin lines of Armin and Quast in the north.

That day, 28th September, he found that the cup of his misfortunes was in nowise full. For at 5.30 in the morning it was Armin's turn. A force, commanded by the King of the Belgians, made up of his own army under General Gillain, the French Sixth Army under Degoutte, and the 19th and 2nd Corps of Plumer's Second Army, attacked on a front of twenty miles from south of Dixmude to Ploegsteert Wood. In the northern area there was a preliminary bombardment of some hours, assisted by British ships from the sea; in Plumer's section of four and a half miles south of the Ypres-Zonnebeke road, there was no warning "preparation." The advance was instantaneously successful. The Belgians, led by their King, fought as men fight who have much to avenge. Armin had no more than five divisions, and could make

little stand. The Belgians took Zonnebeke and Poelcappelle, and cleared Houthulst Forest; while, under Plumer, the 14th, 35th, 29th, and 9th Divisions, supported by the 41st and 36th, pressed far beyond the limits reached in the Third Battle of Ypres, and took Zandvoorde and Becelaere. On their right, the 31st, 30th, and 34th Divisions captured Wytschaete, and reached the crest of the ridge. Next day the Belgians beat off all counter-attacks and went through the second enemy position, carrying Dixmude, Passchendaele, Moorslede, and part of Westroosebeke, and reached the Roulers-Menin road; while Plumer cleared Ploegsteert Wood, took Messines, and held all the left bank of the Lys from Comines westward. Over 10,000 prisoners and some hundreds of guns remained in the Allied hands.

Ludendorff's perplexities had thickened. Gouraud was still pressing on, and was now some two miles north of Somme-py and within half a mile of Monthois, while Pershing was close on Briulles, and had made the Argonne a precarious German salient. The Americans found their task laborious in that confused countryside, and their difficulties were increased by their ardour, for at first they were not always careful to clear the ground behind them — that *nettoyage*, the need of which their allies had learned from bitter experience. Also, as was natural with a new army, some of the divisional staff and transport work was scarcely adequate at the start to the fighting quality of their men. The centre divisions especially had suffered heavily, as they neared the German main line of resistance, and were relieved by the 1st, 3rd, and 32nd Divisions from reserves. Pershing was only twenty miles from Sedan, but it looked as if the gate of the Meuse might be harder to unlock than Foch had imagined. But Cambrai and Douai were in dire peril, and there was imminent risk of the whole German front being outflanked on the north by King Albert's advance. Ludendorff dared not thin the St. Quentin section where Rawlinson was waiting, and his hope of reinforcements from Eberhardt and Mudra had gone. For, on the 28th, the day of the Belgian attack, Mangin and Berthelot had struck between the Ailette and the Vesle.

The new attack began modestly, but by the second day it had reached a depth of three and a half miles, Italian divisions under General Albricci fighting gallantly in the centre. By the 30th Mangin's front ran from Bourg by Braye-en-Laonnois to Filain, and then along the south bank of the Ailette to a point west of Anizy-le-Château, while Berthelot to the east had occupied the

whole ground between the Vesle and the Aisne. That day, too, Gouraud had carried, after a hard fight, the hill called Mont Cuvelet, which commanded the Aisne valley as far as Vouziers. On the 28th no part of the German front was disengaged, except the Siegfried zone from Vendhuile southward. There and there only could reinforcements be found to support the cracking lines in Flanders, on the Aisne, and on the Meuse. But on the 29th that hope vanished, for Haig delivered his supreme attack on the German defences. He struck at the strongest part, and it crumbled before him.

For two days the guns of the Fourth Army had not been silent; the enemy's garrisons were forced into tunnels and deep dug-outs, and the bringing up of food and ammunition was made all but impossible.\* The Germans were therefore in a state of confusion and fatigue when Haig struck at ten minutes to six on the morning of Sunday the 29th. The area of attack was from Marcoing to St. Quentin. The right wing of the Third Army, the 5th and 4th Corps, advanced between Marcoing and Vendhuile, and the left wing of Debeney's French First Army between St. Quentin and Cerizy. But the main thrust was that of the centre, Rawlinson's Fourth Army, on the twelve miles between Holnon and Vendhuile, its dispositions being, from left to right, the 3rd Corps, the 2nd American Corps (Major-General G. W. Read), and the 9th Corps. The 3rd Corps had the section of the Scheldt Canal where the cutting was deep; the Americans had the tunnel area; and the 9th Corps had that part of the canal where it approached ground level and curved eastward.

This action was one of the greatest of the campaign, whether we regard the difficulties to be faced or the strategic value of the gains. Ludendorff was fighting for his last hope, and he had warned his men accordingly. One captured order reminded his troops that "our present position is our winter position." Another ran thus: "There can be no question of going back a single step farther. We must show the British, French, and Americans that any further attacks on the Siegfried Line will be utterly broken, and that that line is an impregnable rampart, with the result that the Entente Powers will condescend to consider the terms of peace which it is absolutely necessary for us to have before we can end the war." Germany was already busy with peace proposals, and

\* In this bombardment we returned to our old methods, because there was no longer an opportunity of obtaining a surprise, and tanks, except in one or two sectors, could not be used to prepare the way for the infantry.



she had nothing to bargain with except those defences in the West.

The key of the position was the angle of the Scheldt Canal where it turned east to Le Tronquoy and held the village of Bellenglise in its bend, for if the canal were forced there, the defences on either side would be turned. The work was entrusted to the men of the 46th (North Midland) Division, which had had a long and brilliant record in the war. Theirs was an amazing performance. The canal before them was some 50 or 60 feet wide, sometimes as much as 10 feet deep in water, sometimes a mere trickle. It was a morning of thick fog when behind the tornado of the barrage the Midlanders, carrying life-belts and mats and rafts, advanced to the attack. Some parts of the canal were impossible, so the crossing had to be made on a narrow front. Swimming or wading, and in some cases using the foot-bridges which the enemy had left undestroyed, they passed the canal west and north of Bellenglise, swarmed up the farther wall, and took the German trenches on the far bank. Then, fanning out, they attacked in rear the positions to the south, capturing many batteries still in action. That day this one division took over 4,000 prisoners and 70 guns.

South of the Midlanders the 1st and 6th Divisions pressed along the west part of the canal bend, over the Thorigny ridge, and reached the west end of the small tunnel at Le Tronquoy. There they found on their left the 32nd Division, which had passed through the 46th and had taken the villages of Lehaucourt and Magny-la-Fosse on the east bank. Meantime, on the Midlanders' left, the American 2nd Corps had done nobly in the tunnel section between Bellenglise and Bony. On its right its 30th Division (Major-General Lewis), men from Tennessee and the Carolinas, broke through the main Siegfried defences and took Bellicourt and Nauroy. North of them its 27th Division (Major-General O'Ryan) reached Bony, and fought a desperate fight for the possession of that village. All day the American front was hotly engaged, bodies of the enemy holding out at the strong points of the intricate system; but by the evening they had cleared the area with the help of the 5th and 3rd Australian Divisions, who came up in support. On Rawlinson's left, the 12th and 18th Divisions of the 3rd Corps advanced around Vendhuile.

The Third Army to the north made good progress. The New Zealanders cleared Welsh Ridge and took La Vacquerie; the 62nd Division took Masnières; and the 63rd, on their left, crossed the Scheldt Canal east of Cantaing, and reached the southern skirts

of Cambrai. Farther north the Canadian Corps took St. Olle and Sancourt, and reached the environs of Cambrai from the north-west. Meantime, on the right of the battle, Debeney took Cerizy and Urvillers and crossed the St. Quentin-La Fère road. Already both Cambrai and St. Quentin were gravely out-flanked.

It had been foggy all day, and in the night the wind rose and the rain fell. On Monday the 30th it was still cloudy. That day the Fourth Army pressed through the gap in the main Siegfried defences. The 1st and 32nd Divisions took Thorigny and Le Tronquoy and the Le Tronquoy tunnel, while the enemy evacuated Villers-Guislain and Gonnelleu, and withdrew behind the Scheldt Canal. The position now was that we were close up to the west bank of the canal between Vendhuile and Crèveœur; north of Crèveœur, in the great bend of Cambrai, we were on the east bank; and from Vendhuile to Le Tronquoy we were well to the east of the canal and through the chief Siegfried trenches. But at Cambrai the German resistance had stiffened. The Canadians were in the suburbs of Proville and Tilloy, but they could only advance slowly.

On Tuesday, 1st October, Rawlinson again attacked in conjunction with Debeney. The latter had hitherto fought chiefly with his right wing. He now flung forward his left, broke through the Siegfried Line, and took Gauchy, while his vanguard entered St. Quentin and held the city as far as the canal, though the enemy still resisted in the eastern suburbs. Byng also advanced, and his right, the 3rd and New Zealand Divisions, took Crèveœur and Rumilly. The Canadians were still battling fiercely in the northern and western skirts of Cambrai. In five days eleven German divisions had been brought up against them, for if they advanced another half-mile Cambrai must fall. Rawlinson took Levergies with the 32nd Division; and the Australian Corps captured Joncourt, Estrées, and Bony, and pushed their line well to the north and east of this last village. The record of that corps was one which it would be hard to parallel. They had been fighting continuously since July, and had advanced in a straight line from Villers-Bretonneux, till now they were half-way to the French frontier. Whatever new task was laid upon them they performed it with an apparently effortless mastery.

The greatest battle in history was now approaching its climax. The whole 250 miles of front from the Meuse to the sea were ablaze.

The Belgians and Plumer were threatening Lille from the north. Cambrai was outflanked, St. Quentin had fallen, and the larger part of the main Siegfried Line had gone, while the Allies were battling through the fortified zone to the last defences of Beauvevoir. Mangin had regained the west part of the Chemin des Dames, and Berthelot had reached the Aisne and cleared all the land between that river and the Vesle. Gouraud was through the first position in Champagne, and close on the final Brunehilde Line. Pershing, though his advance was naturally slower, was feeling for a blow at the most deadly spot of all. Germany's man-power was quickly shrinking, and already, owing to the disbandment of units, she had only 183 divisions in the West, most of them far below strength. Wounded men coming out of hospital were returned direct to the front without passing through the field depots. Her home depots were empty, and her only reserves, apart from her 1920 class, were returned prisoners of war from Russia, who were mutinous and incompetent. From 15th July till the last day of September the Allies in the West had taken more than a quarter of a million prisoners, over 3,600 guns, and 25,000 machine guns. It needed but one effort more to break through the last defences, and leave the enemy, baffled and depleted, to meet the onset of the Allies in a war of movement.

Ludendorff could not have withdrawn even had he so desired. He fell back, indeed, in the one moderately quiet section of the front, that of the British Fifth Army, between the Lys and Vimy. On 2nd October there was a general retirement between Lens and Armentières, and Birdwood occupied Douvrin, La Bassée, Lorgies, and Aubers. By the night of 4th October he was on the line Fresnoy-Sallaumines-Vendin le Vieil-Wavrin-Erquinghem-Houplines. On Thursday, 3rd October, Rawlinson attacked on the eight-mile front between Sequehart and Le Catelet. The 32nd Division took Sequehart, the 50th Gouy and Le Catelet, and the 2nd Australians broke through the northern part of the Beauvevoir-Fonsomme line, the last works of the Siegfried zone. We were now peeping into open country. That day the British were again in Armentières, and Lens was clear of the enemy. On the 5th the villages of Montbrehain and Beauvevoir were captured. This compelled the enemy to leave the upland, called the La Terrière plateau, in the bend of the Scheldt Canal between Le Catelet and Crèvecœur; and his withdrawal enabled Byng's right, which was still on the west bank between Crèvecœur and Vendhuile, to cross and come into line with Rawlinson.



The position by 7th October was therefore as follows: Haig had crossed the Canal du Nord and the Scheldt Canal; he had broken through all the main Siegfried Line and was pressing upon the last defences, in one section being actually beyond them. The time was therefore ripe for a great movement on the broadest possible front which should destroy the whole zone. For, in the words of the official dispatch, "nothing but the natural obstacles of a wooded and well-watered country lay between our armies and Maubeuge." In the action, which began on 26th September, thirty British and two American infantry divisions and one British cavalry division had engaged and defeated thirty-nine German divisions, and taken over 36,000 prisoners and 380 guns.

Nor was the prospect brighter for the enemy on other parts of the front. Pershing had begun on the 4th the second stage of his battle between Briailles on the Meuse and Apremont on the Aire — ten days of some of the fiercest and most difficult fighting in the annals of war. The American 2d Division with Gouraud took on the 5th the key position of Blanc Mont in Champagne, and compelled a withdrawal of the German line. Next day the enemy began to retire on the whole front between Rheims and the Argonne, and by the 6th had reached everywhere his final positions on the northern banks of the Aisne and the Suippe. On the 6th Gouraud crossed the Aisne at several points — an achievement of supreme importance, since it turned all the German positions on the Rheims heights and compelled an extensive retreat. With these positions gone the St. Gobain *massif* and Laon itself were in acute danger. The Belgian advance in the Ypres sector continued steadily but slowly, for the nature of the ground greatly complicated the supply problem; indeed, this difficulty was only surmounted by dropping food and ammunition for the advanced troops from airplane squadrons. Meantime, Debeney at St. Quentin was now four miles east of the canal. If Pershing could get forward in time there was every chance of the retreat becoming a rout.

The next great movement was begun early on Tuesday, 8th October, by Haig. It was a wild, wet autumn morning when Byng at 4.30, and Rawlinson at 5.10, attacked on a 17-mile front, from south of Cambrai to Sequehart, while Debeney extended the battle four miles farther south. The enemy resisted desperately, but no gallantry had power to stay the rush of the Allied infantry and the deadly penetration of their tanks. The whole Siegfried zone disappeared in a cataclysm. On the right the American 30th

Division took Brancourt and Premont; and, following the front northward, the British 66th and 25th Divisions captured Serain; the 38th, Villers-Outreaux and Malincourt; the New Zealanders, Lesdain and Esnes; the 3rd, 2nd, and 63rd, Seranvillers, Forenville, and Niergnies; while, on Byng's extreme left, the 57th Division forced its way forward in the southern part of Cambrai, which the Germans had previously set on fire. By the evening Haig and Debeney had advanced between three and four miles, and the Siegfried zone was no more. The enemy was falling back to the Oise and the Selle, and for a moment his organization had been utterly broken. Every road converging upon Le Cateau was blocked with transport and troops, and our cavalry were galloping eastward to confuse the retreat. On that day we took over 10,000 prisoners and nearly 200 guns.

During the night the Canadians Corps forced its way at last into Cambrai from the north, and joined hands with the 57th Division in its streets. Next day, Wednesday the 9th, Byng and Rawlinson again advanced and pressed the retirement. Cambrai was occupied, and the Canadians pushed three miles east of the town. Bohain was in our hands, Caudry was outflanked, and our advance guards were within two miles of Le Cateau, the old battlefield where, on August 26, 1914, Smith-Dorrien and the 2nd Corps had saved the British retreat. All day our cavalry had been hustling the enemy and cutting off his rearguards. By the 10th the Germans had found a temporary lodgment on the line of the little river Selle, and Haig's front ran from Riquerval Wood along the west bank to Viesly, and thence by St. Hilaire and Avesnes to the Scheldt at Thun St. Martin. Debeney, in the meantime, had pressed east and south-east of St. Quentin, and held the west bank of the Oise-Sambre Canal as far north as Bernot. The lateral railway from St. Quentin by Busigny to Cambrai was wholly in our hands.

Simultaneously with this main action vital progress was made on other parts of the front. On the 8th Gouraud's right was two miles north of the Aisne. Pershing, in order to clear his right flank for a further advance, attacked on the east bank of the Meuse. His 33rd Division crossed the river from the west and, in conjunction with the French 18th and 26th Divisions, seized the triangle of hill between the towns of Brioules, Ornes, and Regneville. By the 10th he had cleared that bank as far as Sivry, while his left and centre were able to advance and seize the Grand-Pré defile, through which ran a lateral railway that for some days had



# THE AMERICAN CAMPAIGN ON THE MEUSE.

(Facing p. 374.)





THE AMERICAN CAMPAIGN ON THE MEUSE.  
(1918-1919)

been denied to the enemy.\* In this advance the 1st Division showed the utmost fortitude and gallantry, and in its ten days' battle lost over 9,000 men. Gouraud took Challerange, and by the 11th Mangin and Guillaumat (who had now replaced Berthelot) had occupied the whole of the Chemin des Dames.

The battle of 8th to 10th October may be reckoned the determining action in the campaign. Consider what had happened in the fifteen days since the 26th of September. Foch had played on the whole front a crescendo of deadly music. First came the attack of Pershing and Gouraud; the next day Haig broke through the main defences of Cambrai; next day Plumer and the Belgians were through the Ypres front, and Mangin and Berthelot were advancing between the Ailette and the Aisne; next day Haig destroyed all but the last lines of the Siegfried zone; a few days later Birdwood was pressing the enemy retreat between Arras and the Lys; on 4th October Gouraud reached the Aisne; on the 8th the British and Americans swept through the Siegfried zone to open country, and Cambrai fell; on the same day, in the south, Pershing and Gouraud, Mangin and Berthelot, were advancing in a linked movement. The death-blow had been struck to the remnant of Germany's military power. Lille must go, and Laon and the St. Gobain heights were as good as lost. The whole southern Hunding and Bruneilde positions, where they had not been already broken, were outflanked. Foch's conception, indeed, had not been wholly realized. He had set Gouraud and Pershing too hard a task, and they were not far enough forward when the Siegfried zone fell to pin the enemy to the trap which had been prepared. Nevertheless, on 8th October Germany was finally beaten.

The main attack had been that of the British and Americans under Haig, and the battle of October 8-10 was rightly described by Foch and the French Staff as "a classic example of the military art." It had no defect either in plan or execution. The enemy was fairly and squarely defeated in a field action. He was defeated, but before that date he was already crumbling; for though, on paper, twenty divisions of British infantry, one of American infantry, and two of British cavalry, routed twenty-four German divisions, an immense preponderance in strength was on the Allied side. The German units were depleted, weary, and disheartened,

\* On 9th October Pershing handed over the direct command of his First Army to Lieut.-General Liggett, and constituted the American Second Army east of the Meuse under Lieut.-General Bullard.

and their organization was cracking. Ludendorff's strategic position was so desperate that no local stand could save him. There was talk of a German retreat to the Meuse, but it was an idle dream. Even had it been possible to conduct such a retirement without crippling losses, with the Allies pressing on in every quarter, the Meuse was no line to abide on. Had Foch's plan succeeded in its entirety, by 10th October Ludendorff would have been brought to the eve of surrender. But the day of doom was merely postponed. Long before her broken divisions could reach the Meuse Germany would be on her knees.



## CHAPTER C

### THE LAST PHASE IN THE WEST

*September 30—November 4, 1918*

Prince Max of Baden appointed Imperial Chancellor—Ludendorff insists on Peace Negotiations—Correspondence with President Wilson—Haig forces the Line of the Selle—Fall of Le Cateau—The Battle of the Rivers—Hard Fighting of the Americans—A "Democratic" Government in Germany—Resignation of Ludendorff—Italian Attack on Piave Front—Battle of Vittorio-Veneto—Capitulation of Austria—Fall of the Hapsburgs.

#### I

THE destruction of the Siegfried defences broke the nerve of the German High Command, and when Ludendorff began to waver it was inevitable that the civilian statesmen should follow suit. The Western offensive had collapsed, and even a Western defensive was becoming doubtful. Bulgaria and Turkey were on the verge of utter defeat. Austria was pleading for peace at any price. The German people were dumbly determined that somehow or other the war should end before the winter. If the army was to be saved, by hook or by crook a way must be found to suspend hostilities, for every day made it clearer that retreat to a line of assured defence was beyond its power. Accordingly the High Command bade the politicians quicken the pace of their negotiations, and, discarding their old line of argument, beg unequivocally for an armistice. They were well aware that such a step would go far to wreck the *moral* of the troops, but they had no other choice.

First, however, a Government must be set up which might find favour in the eyes of their enemies, for Hertling and Hintze were fatally compromised. On 30th September the Emperor accepted the resignation of the Imperial Chancellor and the Foreign Secretary, and announced his desire that "the German people shall co-operate more effectively than hitherto in deciding the fate of the Fatherland." At the same time all the Secretaries of State placed their portfolios at the disposal of the Crown. The other

posts mattered less at the moment, but a new Chancellor was urgently required, for with him it would lie to open negotiations with the enemy Powers. The Emperor's choice fell upon Prince Maximilian of Baden, the cousin of the reigning Grand Duke, and the President of the Upper House of the Baden legislature. He was a man of fifty-one, a student of popular philosophy, and an amateur of liberal thought. His personal charm was considerable, he spoke fluently and well, and he had earned some reputation by his efforts on behalf of the Allied prisoners of war. He was fond of expounding a democracy of his own, which he sedulously distinguished from the molluscos type in vogue — as he said — in America, as well as from the class tyranny of Bolshevism. For the statesmen of the Allies — notably Lord Grey of Fallodon and Mr. Wilson — he professed small respect; but he preached a diluted version of their doctrines. For example, in December 1917 he warned the Baden Upper House that the German people were “too apt to maintain an indolent attitude of acquiescence towards the authorities without any longing to assume personal responsibility for the cause of the Fatherland;” and concluded: “The sword cannot break down the moral opposition that has reared itself against us. If the world is to be reconciled to the greatness of our power, it must feel that behind our power stands a world conscience.”

The new Chancellor had therefore a fair record for amiable if somewhat vague liberalism. He lost no time in setting to work on the task for which he had been appointed, for Army Headquarters were urging that any hour might see a break-through, and pleading that negotiations should be instituted while they had still some semblance of an army. On the evening of 28th September Ludendorff had come to the conclusion that all was lost. Next day he and Hindenburg met the Emperor at Spa, and the immediate result — of which Ludendorff was not informed — was the fall of Hertling and the declaration cited above about parliamentary government. On 1st October Hindenburg informed the civilian statesmen, who asked for a little delay, that he insisted on the peace offer being made not later than next morning, and the Freiherr von der Bussche, whom Ludendorff had sent to Berlin, drew such a tragic picture of the military position that Payer and Prince Max were convinced. The Allied tanks, he said, and the German weakness in reserves had combined to bring about the *débâcle*.\*

\* Ludendorff's story of these events will be found in *My War Memories* (Eng. trans.), II., p. 722, etc. The documents are printed more fully in the official White Book, *Vorgeschichte des Waffenstillstands*, 1919.

On 3rd October Hindenburg repeated his demands more peremptorily; next day Prince Max became Chancellor, and on 5th October sent to President Wilson a Note (the draft of which had been prepared by Ludendorff) asking him to take in hand the restoration of peace, and to invite the Allies to send plenipotentiaries to open negotiations. He announced that Germany accepted the President's proposals set forth in his message to Congress of January 8, 1918 (the famous "Fourteen Points"), and in his later pronouncements, as a basis for the discussion of peace terms. In order to prevent further bloodshed he asked for the conclusion of an immediate armistice on land and water and in the air. That same day the Government of Vienna dispatched a message to Washington with the same purport.

These appeals marked a notable step in German policy, for they specifically accepted as their basis a speech which President Wilson had made in New York on 27th September on the eve of the opening of the fourth great American war loan. In that speech he had declared that the price of peace was "impartial justice in every item of the settlement, no matter whose interest is crossed," and had developed this thesis in five particulars.\* Germany may well have believed that these principles would be unacceptable to certain classes among her opponents, especially in France, and hoped thereby to drive a wedge into the alliance. But Mr. Wilson had also dealt faithfully with the Governments of the Central Powers. "They have convinced us that they are without honour, and do not intend justice. They observe no covenants, accept no principle but force and their own interest. We cannot 'come to terms' with them. They have made it impossible. The German people must by this time be fully aware that we cannot accept the word of those who forced this war upon us. We do not

*\*First*, the impartial justice meted out must involve no discrimination between those to whom we wish to be just and those to whom we do not wish to be just. It must be a justice which plays no favourites and knows no standard but the equal rights of the several peoples concerned.

*Second*, no special or separate interest of any single nation or any group of nations can be made the basis of any part of the settlement which is not consistent with the common interest of all.

*Third*, there can be no leagues or alliances or special covenants and understandings within the general and common family of the League of Nations.

*Fourth*, and more specifically, there can be no special, selfish economic combinations within the League, and no employment of any form of economic boycott or exclusion, except as the power of economic penalty, by exclusion from the markets of the world, may be vested in the League of Nations itself as a means of discipline and control.

*Fifth*, all international agreements and treaties of every kind must be made known in their entirety to the rest of the world.



think the same thoughts or speak the same language of agreement." Prince Max's acceptance of the speech of 27th September involved, therefore, a repudiation of his predecessors.

That day, 5th October, in the Reichstag, he elaborated his policy. He stood, he said, on the ground of Germany's reply to the Pope's Note of August 1, 1917, and of the Reichstag resolution of 19th July in the same year. He was an enthusiast for a League of Nations on the basis of equal rights for all, both weak and strong. He advocated the complete restoration of Belgium, and hoped that an understanding could be reached as to an indemnity. He would not permit the Russian treaties to stand in the way of a settlement. Finally he declared that in selecting the members of the new Government he had selected only those who stood "on the basis of a just peace, regardless of the war situation," and who had "openly declared this to be their standpoint at the time when we stood at the height of our military successes." Among such could not be reckoned Prince Max himself, for in the preceding February, on the eve of the great Western attack, he had written a letter to Prince Alexander of Hohenlohe, in which this striking passage occurred: "As I reject parliamentary institutions for both Germany and Baden, I had to tell the German and the Baden people that I understand their need, but that I do not believe such institutions would bring them any help. As regards the question of peace, my line is exactly the same. Even I naturally wish to make as much as possible out of our successes. In contrast to the so-called Peace Resolution \* (the hateful child of fright and the Berlin dog days), I want to get as much in the way of indemnities as we can in any shape or form, so that the end of the war will not leave us impoverished. On this point I do not quite agree with you. I still think that it is not necessary to say more about Belgium than has been said already. The enemy know enough already, and Belgium is the only commodity we have to barter with in dealing with an enemy as cunning and wide-awake as England." The publication of this letter did not improve Prince Max's prestige. The Whig aristocrat is an ancient type, and his wavering impulses and intermittent flirtations with democracy have made sport for the cynic in every age.

On 8th October Mr. Wilson replied. In the first place, he asked the Imperial Chancellor what precisely he meant. Did Germany accept the terms he had laid down in his speeches, and was her object in entering upon discussions merely to decide the

\* The Reichstag resolution of July 19, 1917.

practical details of their application? In the second place, he announced that America could not propose to her Allies a cessation of hostilities so long as the armies of the Central Powers were upon Allied soil. As a guarantee of good faith there must first be withdrawal from invaded territory. In the third place, he asked if Prince Max spoke for the constituted authorities of the Empire who had so far conducted the war.

Germany made haste to answer, for by 12th October, the date of the reply, the last remnants of the Siegfried zone had gone, and Gouraud and Pershing had made dangerous progress toward Mezières. To President Wilson's first and third questions the answer was yes, on the understanding that the Governments of America's allies also accepted the President's principles. As for the second, Germany and Austria were willing to evacuate invaded territory as a preliminary to an armistice, and suggested a mixed commission to make the necessary arrangements. Small wonder that Germany assented. To get her troops back intact to her frontier was her dearest wish. She was in truth offering nothing and asking everything. Evacuation by consent would no doubt mean that the French and Belgian towns still in her power would suffer no further destruction; but it was unlikely, with the shadow of defeat hanging over her, that she would persist in such destruction and so increase the indemnities to be exacted from her. It would mean, on the other hand, the immunity of her armies from a besetting danger, for Ludendorff was engaged in an impossible task. Her reply opened the eyes of the most ingenuous among the Allies to the snare spread before them. Peace negotiations were impossible without an armistice, for otherwise the currency of negotiations would be changing from day to day; but an armistice such as she suggested would rob Foch of that military advantage which he had so laboriously won. There was nothing to prevent Germany, once safe inside her frontiers, from breaking off negotiations and instituting war on a new plan. It was clear that if an armistice came it must be one which was equivalent to surrender.

On 14th October Mr. Wilson made his reply, and there was no dubiety about the terms. Events of some significance had happened within the past days. On the morning of 10th October the Irish mail boat had been torpedoed, with the loss of nearly 500 lives. On 14th October the report of a British committee on the treatment by Germany of prisoners taken in the spring of 1918 was published, recording certain ugly cases of callousness

and brutality. The Allies were not in the mood to be tender with their failing enemy. The President told Prince Max that no armistice could be considered while Germany continued her illegal and inhuman practices. He pointed out that one of his principal terms had been the destruction of every arbitrary Power which could disturb the peace of the world; the power which had hitherto controlled Germany was of this type: what guarantees were there that it had been changed? "It is indispensable that the Governments associated against Germany should know beyond a peradventure with whom they have been dealing." Most important of all, he clinched in memorable words the question of an armistice, and destroyed Germany's last hope on that score.

"It must be clearly understood that the process of evacuation and the conditions of an armistice are matters which must be left to the judgment and advice of the military advisers of the Government of the United States and the Allied Governments, and the President feels it his duty to say that no arrangement can be accepted by the Government of the United States which does not provide absolutely satisfactory safeguards and guarantees of the maintenance of the present military supremacy of the armies of the United States and of the Allies in the field."

This was final. Foch and Haig, Pétain and Pershing, were not likely to fling away the predominance which was now assured to them.\*

## II

The history of events runs now in two parallel streams, one of diplomacy and one of war. We turn to the campaign in the field.

By the evening of 10th October Haig was in the western skirts of Le Cateau, and our troops held the very slopes where in August 1914 Smith-Dorrien had fought his great battle against odds, and bluffed Kluck at a moment when that general had victory in his hands. Pershing and Gouraud were threatening the southern

\* On 15th October President Wilson informed Austria that the tenth of his original points must be modified, in view of the recognition by the U.S.A. of the Czecho-Slovaks as a *de facto* belligerent Government, and of the national aspirations of the Southern Slavs. "The President is no longer at liberty to accept a mere 'autonomy' of these peoples as a basis of peace, but is obliged to insist that they, and not he, shall be the judge of what action on the part of the Austro-Hungarian Government will satisfy their aspirations."



section of the vital lateral railway; Lille was in danger of envelopment; the two great salients — between the Lys and the Somme, and between the Selle and the Argonne — were becoming daily more precarious. Ludendorff had no further thought of holding what for two years he had regarded as his key positions — Lille and the St. Gobain *massif* — for the other keys, such as Cambrai and St. Quentin, had gone. His one object was to protect the railway Lille-Valenciennes-Hirson-Mezières long enough to ensure an orderly withdrawal; for if it fell too soon, large parts of his intricate front would be cut off. Accordingly he expedited the general retirement between the sea and the Meuse, and massed his chief resistance in the sections where the railway was most directly threatened — against Pershing and Gouraud in the south, and against Rawlinson, Byng, and Horne in the centre.

The Selle is a little stream which runs from the hilly ground around Bohain and Busigny northwards by Le Cateau and Solesmes to join the Scheldt. On its east bank the enemy had taken up position, and Haig's first business was to master the river line. By the 13th he had reached the Selle as far north as Haspres, and held strong bridgeheads on the east bank. Meantime Horne's left and Birdwood's right had been closing in on Douai from north and south. On the 12th the western side of the Sensée Canal between Arleux and Corbehem had been cleared, and the outskirts of Douai reached; and east of Lens we were in Montigny and Annay. On the 17th Douai was evacuated by the enemy.

The time had come for a forward movement in the north, where the difficulties of the countryside compelled long delays for the reorganization of traffic routes before each stage of the advance. At 5.35 on the morning of Monday, 14th October, King Albert attacked on the whole front between Dixmude and Comines on the Lys, with the Belgians on his left; the French, under Degoutte, and further Belgian troops in the centre; and the British Second Army, under Plumer, on the right, between the Menin-Roulers road and the Lys. In spite of the difficulties of the Flanders autumn, the Allies moved fast, for they were beyond the area which had been tortured by four years of incessant war. The British 10th and 19th Corps pushed forward to the heights overlooking Menin and Wervicq; the 2nd Corps took Moorseele; the French surrounded Roulers, and the Belgians took Iseghem and Cortemarck. Next day Menin and Wervicq fell, and Thourout was

surrounded. By the 16th Plumer held the north bank of the Lys from Frelinghien to Harlebeke, and had forced a passage at many points, while the French and the Belgians to the north had advanced eighteen miles since the morning of the 14th. Armin had no choice but to retreat. By the evening of the 16th the Allied front ran from the Lys at Harlebeke by Pitthem and the western skirts of Bruges to the neighbourhood of Ostend. Next day the British Navy had arranged to descend upon Ostend, but when Sir Roger Keyes arrived he found the place empty, and the enemy fled. Three days later the advance guards of the Allies were on the Dutch frontier. This was the end of the use of Belgium for German submarines and aircraft, and by the work of these six days Germany's sea-base had been flung back 300 miles to the Weser.

King Albert's advance had made Lille untenable. With Plumer at Harlebeke and Horne at Douai its defence was outflanked, and Quast fell back between the Lys and the Sensée, with Birdwood's Fifth Army at his heels. On the 15th we forced the Haute Deule Canal on a wide front north of Pont-à-Vendin. Early on the morning of Thursday, the 17th, our airmen reported that the enemy was retiring from Lille, and had sent out some thousands of civilians towards our lines. At noon a patrol of the Liverpools entered the city, to be received with frenzied joy by the inhabitants; and that night divisions of the British 8th and 11th Corps had reached the outskirts. Next day Lille was occupied by our troops, and the 15th Corps pressed on to the east, taking Roubaix and Tourcoing. The capital of the north-east was restored to France, and its statue in the Place de la Concorde could once again be garlanded with flowers.

The progress of that week was not less conspicuous in the south, where the French First, Tenth, and Fifth Armies were directed towards the Hunding Line, the last German defences between the Oise and the Aisne. As early as the 11th there were signs of a withdrawal from the Laon salient. The St. Gobain *massif* was relinquished, and at ten in the morning of the 13th Mangin's vanguard entered Laon, and *Te Deum* was sung in the great cathedral. The VII. and I. German Armies were falling back on the Hunding Line, which ran along the Serre from its junction with the Oise, then along the Sissonne, and thence to the Aisne at Condé-lez-Herpy. Behind that line lay another, the Hagen, which was the protection of the lateral railway at Hirson, as the Siegfried zone had been its protection in the Valenciennes

section. By the 15th Mangin and Guillaumat were in touch with the front Hunding position. On their left Debeney, with the French First Army, held the western bank of the Oise, from the mouth of the Serre to near Hauteville, whence he stretched north to the west of Mennevret till he linked up with Rawlinson at Vaux Andigny on the Selle.

The next move lay with Haig. Already he was within eight miles of Valenciennes. It was his business to force the Selle positions, and reach a front from the Sambre-et-Oise Canal by the western edge of the Forest of Mormal to Valenciennes, and so destroy the section of the main railway north of Avesnes. The advance began with an attack by Rawlinson at 5.20 on the morning of Thursday the 17th. He had in line, from right to left, the 9th, 2nd American, and 13th Corps, embracing the 46th, 1st, 6th, 30th American, 27th American, 50th and 66th Divisions, while Debeney moved forward in support on his right. The battleground ran from Le Cateau southward for ten miles, including the upper course of the Selle and the difficult wooded slopes about Bohain. The Germans were in strength, and for two days offered a gallant resistance; but Le Cateau fell to the 13th Corps, after a fine attack by the reconstituted South African Brigade, and by the evening of the 19th the enemy's salient at Bohain had been wiped out, he had been driven from the upper Selle, and forced beyond the Sambre-et-Oise Canal almost everywhere south of Catillon. This meant the loss to the Germans of the new water-line south of Le Cateau. Moreover, Debeney was not only across the canal with his left, but across the Oise itself with his centre and right between Ribemont and Mont d'Origny, whence his line ran south-eastward to Pouilly on the Serre.

Next day Byng struck with the 38th, 17th, 5th, 42nd, 62nd, Guards, and 19th Divisions, and Horne's right division, the 4th, co-operated. His aim was the Selle line north of Le Cateau to Denain, five miles from Valenciennes, where that stream joins the Scheldt. Here again the enemy resisted stoutly, and he had had time to wire his positions. Nevertheless, we forced the passage of the Selle, took Solesmes, fought our way, with the assistance of tanks, up the eastern slopes, and by the close of the rainy afternoon were looking down on the little valley of the Harpies. On the left, Horne reached the left bank of the Ecaillon River, and took Denain. All along the line there was a conspicuous advance. Birdwood was now within two miles of Tournai, Plumer and Degoutte were crossing the Lys on a wide front, and the Belgians,



having taken Bruges and Zeebrugge, lay along the Lys Canal from Deynze to the Dutch frontier.

The Selle position had fallen, and Haig could now move towards his larger objective, the line from Valenciennes to the Sambre-et-Oise Canal along the west edge of the Mormal Forest. The enemy was seeking a new water-front, the Scheldt and the Sambre Canal, each broad and navigable, and therefore formidable barriers against tanks, but separated by a wide neck of land. He was about to lose another part of his lateral line, for the Valenciennes section was almost out of use; but if he could hold the Mormal Forest, he had an alternative — the branch from Avesnes to Maubeuge and Mons, and thence to Ghent and Brussels. The position was a strong one — the Scheldt, the Sambre Canal, and the Mormal forest — but it had one weak spot. Between the Scheldt and the northern end of the forest was a gap of ten miles. Across this gap ran two little streams, the Ecaillon and the Rhonelle, and on these the enemy proposed to stand. If Haig broke through that gap, the whole position must crumble.

Haig struck in force on Wednesday, 23rd October, on a front of fifteen miles from a point north-east of Haussy to Mazinghien, south of Catillon. On the first day Rawlinson, on the right, attacked at 1.20 in the morning, with the 9th and 13th Corps, embracing the 1st, 6th, 25th, and 18th Divisions, while Byng, on the left, brought into action the 5th, 4th, 6th, and 17th Corps, including the 33rd, 21st, 5th, 42nd, 37th, New Zealand, 3rd, 2nd, and 19th Divisions. Next day the 61st Division of the 17th Corps, and Horne's right, the 4th and 51st Divisions of the 22nd Corps, extended the battle five miles farther north to the Scheldt. The Battle of the Rivers — the Scheldt, the little streams in the gap, the Sambre-et-Oise Canal, and farther south the Serre and the Aisne and the Meuse — was now beginning: the last of the great conflicts in the West. Everywhere on the centre and left the Allies were now in open country, and facing hastily prepared field defences; but in the south Mangin and Guillaumat, Gouraud and Pershing, had still to carry the final system fortified on the old enemy plan.

The problem before Pershing had now become the most difficult of that of any army commander. The German position in the Argonne was nearly invulnerable to frontal attack, and the plan of pressing forward on both sides of the wooded ridge was foreseen by the enemy, and made difficult by prepared defences of the greatest strength and the intractable nature of the terrain. The American

First Army was given a task like the British at the Battle of the Somme, and, like the British, suffered from its lack of experience and its too audacious gallantry. It had not yet learned, as the commands of Haig and Pétain had learned, caution and wiliness by bitter experience. Haig's armies had now behind them a marvellously complete organization, which enabled them to fight continuously, and which could not have been improvised. But while some part of Pershing's difficulties were no doubt due to the lack of the proper co-operation between infantry, artillery, transport, and aircraft, which cannot be learned in a few months, it must not be forgotten what was Pershing's purpose. His front of eighteen miles between the Meuse and the Argonne was miserably supplied with roads — one along the Meuse, one on the edge of the Argonne, one by Montfaucon in the centre, all bad, and too much exposed to enemy fire. The finest transport system in the world must have broken down under such handicaps. But for the engineers to construct a new road system meant delay, and the problem was, therefore, that, if the war was not to drag into 1919, the splendid fighting stuff of the American infantry must be used in spite of all disadvantages. It was a bold decision for the commander to take, but it was essentially wise, and it was a decisive factor in victory. But the price paid was high. By 28th September the Americans had penetrated seven miles inside the enemy's lines; it took them eleven days to advance two miles more. They were now in direct contact with the Kriemhilde system, and the attack of 14th October — for which the 5th and 42nd Divisions had been brought up — failed to break it. On the 15th the 77th Division, on the left, which had been fighting continuously for twenty days in the Argonne woods, entered the town of Grand-Pré, which was finally captured by the 78th on the 25th. Meantime the enemy had evacuated Briulles on the Meuse, and the divisions on the right of the river were slowly creeping forward. When the second phase of Pershing's attack closed on 31st October the last Kriemhilde position had not been taken. The American First Army had fought a new Wilderness Campaign which may well rank for valour and tenacity with the old.

Against Haig, now approaching the Mormal forest, the other great German defensive effort was made. The weather was bad, and the misty air made it hard to locate enemy batteries, while the undevastated woods and hamlets gave endless chances for machine-gun resistance. The Mormal forest, too, afforded a perfect screen for counter-attacks. Yet in two days the British

Fourth, Third, and First Armies advanced six miles. The launching of the attack at different hours was a repetition in miniature of Foch's general strategy. They forced the outer defences formed by the Ecaillon and its tributaries, the Harpies and the St. George, taking Thiart on the Scheldt and the village of Vendegies-sur-Ecaillon. They did not attempt to enter the forest, nor to touch Landrecies at its south-western end, though they cleared the enemy out of the adjacent Bois l'Evêque; nor did they make any further assault on Valenciennes. Haig's aim was to take both this last town and the Mormal wood by turning movements. On the evening of the 24th he was on the western skirts of the forest, and within a mile of Le Quesnoy. For the next few days he advanced slowly, but by the 27th was east of the main railway from the skirts of Le Quesnoy to Famars, where the 51st Division was repeating its familiar exploits. In the operations in this area since 17th October twenty-four British and two American divisions had been opposed by thirty-one German, and had taken from them 20,000 prisoners and 475 guns.

By the last day of October Haig had established bridgeheads east of the Rhonelle, while Plumer and Degoutte had made good progress between the Lys and the Scheldt. The British advance had had its effect on the line farther south, and the Germans had evacuated the angle between the Oise and the Serre. By the end of the month Debeney was in the outskirts of Guise, while Guillaumat had reached the line St. Quentin-le-Petit-Banogne-Condé-lez-Herpy. Each was about twenty-three miles distant from Hirson. This area offered special opportunities for a great advance, for it was the old avenue by which the armies of France had been wont to move upon Namur and East Flanders. Though there were many little streams and woods, there were no broad rivers or continuous ranges to assist the defence. Gouraud had changed direction and was facing north-east. The American front now ran from the Meuse at Sivry, along the river to north of Briuelles, and then south of Cléry, Landres-St. George, and Champigneulle to south of Grand-Pré. In the month's fighting on this front they had taken 24,000 prisoners and over 150 guns.

The condition of Ludendorff's forces was becoming tragic. If those of the Allies were tired, his were in the last stages of fatigue. On 21st March he had possessed a reserve of eighty fresh divisions, and during April, May, and June divisions were not sent back to the line without at least a month of rest and training. On 31st October he had but one fresh division, and the intervals of



rest had shrunk to nine days — far too short to permit of recovery. Moreover, these wearied units were returned to the front without being brought up to strength, and divisions entered the line numbering less than 1,000 rifles. The regiments in some divisions had been reduced from nine companies to three; twenty-five divisions had been disbanded altogether, and their places were badly filled by five third-rate units brought during October from Russia. Of the 18,000 pieces of artillery on the Western front on 15th July, a third had since then been captured or destroyed. Batteries had been reduced from four to three or even two guns, and divisions coming from Russia went into action without artillery, trench mortars, or machine guns. The total shortage of rifles on establishment was at least half a million, and the only reserves were the remains of the 1920 class, the last hope of Germany's man-power, which she was now sacrificing. Ludendorff was fighting with the fury of despair to delay his retirement, so that he might move his vast quantities of material, and consequently he could give his broken troops no rest. The result was that their discipline was breaking, and the whole enemy *moral* was on the brink of collapse. Prodigies of gallantry and sacrifice were performed by the remnants of the old officer class and notably by the machine gunners, but no valour could prevail against overmastering physical weakness.

To make matters worse, it was clear that there was no city of refuge in the shape of a shorter line to which he could retreat and find a breathing space. There was indeed the theoretical line based on Antwerp, and running along the lower Scheldt to Termonde, and thence by the Dendre, covering Brussels, and by Namur and the Meuse to Mézières. But this line had the glaring disadvantage that in the central Meuse section it had no lateral communications, and that it would not be sufficiently shorter to enable him to save greatly in men. If he fell farther back he might get a line about half the length of his present front, from Liège, over the high moors of the Ardennes, covering Luxembourg, Thionville, and Metz. But that would bring him close to his own frontier, and expose Germany's chief industrial area to the perils of war; to fall back upon that would be to admit defeat. As for the line of the Rhine, it had the same drawbacks intensified, and it was of an impossible length. But, indeed, the whole discussion of those remote positions was academic. Had the enemy reached them, he could not have stayed in them, and it was very certain that he would never reach them. The Meuse was already turned. It

needed but a final bound to set the Americans astride the Metz railway. With Haig pressing fiercely in on the centre it was inevitable that the retreat would be largely shepherded northward, with appalling losses, into the gap of Liége, and there, on the scene of her worse infamies, Germany would meet her fate. The men who had outraged Belgium were mostly dead in dishonoured graves, but justice would be done upon their haggard successors. The shadow of a far more terrible Sedan brooded over the proud German High Command.

### III

In such circumstances it was small wonder that Germany strove feverishly for peace. She flung dignity to the winds, blasphemed her old gods, and recanted with indecent haste her former creeds — not as a penitent, but as a criminal who stands condemned and seeks to ingratiate himself with his judges. Ludendorff's spirits, indeed, rallied for a moment. Mr. Wilson's second reply had appalled the Army chiefs, with its prospect of complete military dissolution, and at the Cabinet meeting of 17th October he had protested against unconditional surrender, and urged a last effort of defence, on the ground that now it was clear that the Allies' terms could be no worse if Germany were utterly defeated. He still hoped to hold the British on the Selle and the Americans on the Kriemhilde line. But Prince Max, realizing that the mutterings of revolution in Germany were growing louder, and that the General Staff had returned to a fool's paradise, chose to go his own way. On 20th October he addressed a Note to Mr. Wilson, agreeing to leave the conditions of armistice to the military advisers of both sides, and to accept the present relative strength on the fronts as the basis of arrangement, trusting to the President to approve no demand "irreconcilable with the honour of the German People." He denied the charge of illegal and inhuman practices in war, but undertook, "in order to avoid anything that might impede the efforts to secure peace," to instruct the U-boat commanders for the future to refrain from torpedoing passenger ships. As for the President's condition about the removal of every arbitrary power, he urged that Germany had already set her house in order. Her new Government was free from all arbitrary influence, and approved by an overwhelming majority of the people.

"A fundamental change has come about in this regard. The new Government has been formed in complete accord with the desires of a Parliament which issued from equal, general, secret, and direct suffrage. The leaders of the great parties of the Reichstag are amongst its members. In the future, too, no Government can enter upon or carry on its office without possessing the confidence of the majority of the Reichstag. The responsibility of the Imperial Chancellor towards Parliament is being legally extended and safeguarded. The first act of the new Government was to submit a Bill to the Reichstag so amending the Constitution of the Empire that the approval of Parliament is requisite for a decision on war and peace."

The new German Ministers claimed that their Government had been democratized. But the claim was untrue. The sovereignty of the German Empire lay in the Bundesrath or Federal Council, of which Prussia, represented by the Imperial Chancellor, held the presidency and the majority of votes. The Secretaries of State were not Ministers of the Empire in the constitutional sense: they were subordinates of the Chancellor, who was the spokesman of the Federated Governments, with whom the power lay. The delegates to the Federal Council were not elected by any franchise, popular or otherwise; they were nominated by each Government without parliamentary control. The recent changes had in no way modified the prerogatives of the Bundesrath, or transferred the seat of power from it to a new Imperial Government. The Chancellor was not a member of the Reichstag, nor was there any constitutional guarantee that in the future he would not be appointed without the assent of the Reichstag majority. The German claim that responsible and representative government had been introduced was therefore false; the recent changes in no way touched the heart of the constitutional position. But that the claim should have been made was a proof of Germany's dire predicament. Only nine months before Prince Max had been declaring that he rejected the idea of parliamentary institutions for his country. Scarcely a German politician of note but had praised the existing constitution as the last word in human wisdom. It was not easy for the Allies to believe in the sincerity of this death-bed repentance. History has rarely shown a parallel to such a case of a political creed brazenly flaunted for decades, and then suddenly within a week or two as brazenly recanted.

On 23rd October Mr. Wilson replied. Germany sought to place him in an invidious position with respect to his allies by addressing her communications only to him, but his cautious and



measured answers were the authentic voice of the whole Alliance. He took note of the German asseverations, but repeated that the only armistice that he would feel justified in submitting to his colleagues was one which made impossible a renewal of hostilities on the part of Germany. Should such an armistice be accepted it would be the best proof of the *bona fides* of Germany's new professions. He solemnly warned Berlin that he found the boasted reforms far from adequate.

"It may be that future wars have been brought under the control of the German people; but the present war has not been; and it is with the present war that we are dealing. It is evident that the German people have no means of commanding the acquiescence of the military authorities of the Empire in the popular will; that the power of the King of Prussia to control the policy of the Empire is unimpaired; that the determining initiative still remains with those who have hitherto been the masters of Germany. . . . The President deems it his duty . . . to point out once more that, in concluding peace and attempting to undo the infinite injuries and injustices of this war, the Government of the United States cannot deal with any but veritable representatives of the German people, who have been assured of a genuine constitutional standing as the real rulers of Germany. If it must deal with the military masters and monarchical autocrats of Germany now, and if it is likely to have to deal with them later in regard to the international obligations of the German Empire, it must demand not peace negotiations but surrender."

This Note was the last main stage in the diplomatic conversations. It left no loophole of escape. In effect it demanded the abdication of the Emperor and the destruction of all for which he had stood; it asked that the Great General Staff should be deposed from their autocracy and placed under civilian control; it declined to treat save with new men bearing a popular mandate. To accept these demands was tantamount to an admission of final defeat in the field. Germany accepted them on 27th October, declaring that peace negotiations would be conducted by a people's Government, to which the military powers were subject. The American President had distinguished between peace negotiations and surrender, but the two things were now for Germany the same. The reply of 27th October, as Ludendorff correctly divined, was Germany's capitulation.

On Saturday, 26th October, Ludendorff resigned. Few friends now remained to him. The German people at large saw in his

military dictatorship of the past two years the cause of their misfortunes, and especially they blamed him for the rash optimism which had led to the March offensive; while the reactionaries reprobated him as the originator of the first armistice proposals, which had taken the heart out of the army. He had had an amazing career since, in August 1914, he first entered Liège as a conqueror, and some weeks later stood, a still obscure general, by the side of Hindenburg in the Masurian battles. At the age of fifty-three he had been one of the triumvirate that ruled Germany; and now, almost on the anniversary of his "crowning mercy" of Caporetto, he had gone the way of the younger Moltke and Falkenhayn. He was a soldier of all but the highest ability, the indefatigable, clear-headed, iron-willed type of German officer; and it does not appear that either his nerve or his acumen failed. He was accused by his countrymen of proposing an armistice prematurely, and then attempting feverishly to go back on his policy and intrigue for a military *coup d'état*. But the accusation was only the plea of those who, to salve their pride, maintained that the German Army had been betrayed rather than defeated. Ludendorff judged correctly enough the situation of his troops, and sought to avert a supreme disaster. He resigned when that disaster was imminent, because the direction of affairs had gone out of his hands. The Government of Berlin was treating for an armistice the terms of which must lie at Foch's discretion, and the High Command, from the Kaiser to the most junior staff officer, was now superseded by Prince Max and Erzberger, Solf and Scheidemann, and the other proselytes of democracy.

Upon Ludendorff and his world the Twilight of the Gods was falling. In the wild legends of the Northern races the shades of the dead appeared to those on the brink of doom, and the heavens were filled with the Shield-maidens riding to choose the slain. The superstitious among Germany's rulers had in those days the spectacle of many portents to convince them of approaching calamity. Everywhere the wheel was coming full circle. The Belgians were approaching the dark land where each village spoke of German crimes. The British were almost within sight of the region where they had first met the enemy, swinging south, as he thought, to victory before the leaves fell. The French and the Americans had but a little way to go till their eyes beheld the wooded hills of Sedan. The alliances of which Germany had boasted were now utterly dissolved; Turkey and Bulgaria were prostrate, and Austria was pleading desperately for peace. More ominous still, that Eastern

Europe which had seen her most spectacular triumphs was like to prove her worst undoing. The poison of Bolshevism, with which she had sought to inoculate her opponents, was beginning to creep into her own veins. Whatever crimes she had committed in the long war were now blossoming to her hurt.

"The Gods alone  
Remember everlastingly; they strike  
Remorselessly and ever like for like.  
By their great memories the Gods are known."

#### IV

By the beginning of the last week of October the Dual Monarchy as a state was dead. Count Julius Andrassy, who had taken Burian's place as Foreign Minister, made an ineffective journey to Switzerland to attempt to negotiate with the Allies; but he found every door closed, and realized that he was fated not to repeat his father's achievement, but to sign the death-warrant of that Austria-Hungary which his father had helped to create. The manifesto of the Emperor Charles, promising a separate state to each of the Austrian races, had been the last step in the process of disintegration. The Czecho-Slovaks had on 18th October, through their Provisional Government in Paris, declared their independence; the Southern Slavs were preparing to follow suit; on 24th October there was a mutiny of the Croat garrison at Fiume; Hungary and German Austria alike were clamouring to be free of the encumbrance of antipathetic associates in the moribund Empire. But the Austrian Army in Italy was still alive, and till that army was destroyed in the field the Empire would not disappear. The army would remain till it was decisively beaten, and then the political and moral causes which had wrecked the Dual Monarchy would complete its ruin. It is not the least strange of the ironies of the war that on 26th October the only forces of the Teutonic League which had not suffered military defeat were the despised levies of Austria. Bulgarians and Turks had been vanquished; the Germans were staggering to their fall; but the Austrians were still unconquered. Their part in the campaign had been consistently decried by their German masters; but the sneer was not deserved. Out of a museum of antagonistic races Austria had created an army which was of first-rate quality in many of its services, and showed a stamina under enormous handicaps almost as



great as Germany's own. Marvellous is the power of a military machine and a long tradition of discipline. It was the army which had always been the one true force of unity in the Empire. In 1848, when the thing seemed to be dissolving, Radetsky's victory at Custozza had renewed its lease for another seventy years. Until the army was beaten the Hapsburg spectre would not finally disappear.

During the early autumn there was much speculation among the Allies as to why Diaz did not launch an attack in co-operation with the offensives in France and the East. But the Italian Commander-in-Chief, as we have seen, had reasons for his delay. He had lent troops to Foch, and since Austria had now but the one front, she mustered against him a superiority of twelve divisions and a 20 per cent. predominance in artillery. She had all the best positions, and, as has been noted in earlier chapters, Italy was singularly ill-placed for attack. An abortive attempt would have strengthened Austrian *moral* and weakened the Italian, and Diaz was well aware that after the past year he could not take liberties with the delicate temper of his armies. The immense losses of Italy were not appreciated in Europe; but out of a population of 34 million she had mobilized 5 million men, had lost nearly 470,000 killed and nearly 1,000,000 wounded, of whom more than half a million were permanently disabled. He accordingly waited till the process of internal decay in Austria had become accelerated, and she had no hope of assistance from any of her allies. Fate so disposed it that the date of his final offensive should be the anniversary of Caporetto.

Diaz's forces in October were in constitution a microcosm of the whole alliance. He had fifty-one Italian divisions, three British, two French, one Czecho-Slovak, as well as one American regiment. He had altered his dispositions considerably since the June battle. On the Asiago plateau lay the Italian Sixth Army, containing one British division (the 48th). Between the Brenta and the Piave in the Grappa section was the Fourth Army, under Giardino, including one French division. Along the Piave as far south as the Montello was the Twelfth Army, under the French general Graziani, with one French division. At the Montello lay Caviglia's Eighth Army. South of it was the Tenth Army, the command of which Diaz had entrusted to Lord Cavan, consisting of the 11th Italian Corps and the British 14th Corps, which latter had two divisions (the 7th and the 23rd). South of Cavan to the Adriatic lay the Duke of Aosta's Third Army.

Diaz's strategy was simple but sufficient. The battle was to begin with a feint attack by the Fourth Army on the Grappa. Then the main blow was to be delivered by the Twelfth, Eighth, and Tenth Armies against the VI. and V. Austrian Armies, so as to drive a wedge between them and cut the communications connecting the Austrian forces in the mountains with those in the plains. He had not many advantages of position, but he had one; he held the interior lines, and if he could split the outer segment and capture the few precarious routes which linked the Trentino with Venetia, he could destroy the halves piecemeal. There were two points to aim for. One was Feltre, on the Piave, whence a road ran into the Trentino, another south to the plains, and a railway to Belluno; the second was Vittorio Veneto, through which ran the communications of the Austrian VI. Army by way of the low water-shed of the Valmarino. The task of the Twelfth Army was to fight its way up the Piave to Feltre, of the Eighth Army to make good the Valmarino and Vittorio, and so drive the Austrian VI. Army northward, and of the Tenth Army to move due east to the Livenza, protecting the flanks of the two armies on its left in their sweep northward, and driving the V. Army in a different direction of retreat from its neighbour.

The first step must be the crossing of the Piave. That was difficult everywhere, for there had been heavy rains, and the river was in flood. It was most difficult, perhaps, opposite the front of the Tenth Army, where it was a mile and a half broad, a hundred streams racing between a multitude of islands, with a current of ten miles an hour in the main channel. The largest island was that known as the Grave di Papadopoli, some three miles long by one broad. It occurred to Lieutenant-General Sir J. M. Babington, commanding the British 14th Corps, that it might be well to occupy this island previous to the general attack, and Cavan agreed. The British troops in the front line were all in the Italian *grigio-verde* uniform, and no British guns were permitted to fire, for had the Austrians discovered our presence in that area they might have guessed the scheme of the coming offensive.

On the night of Wednesday, 23rd October, two British battalions embarked in strange little punts, each holding six men, and were ferried by *pontieri* of the Italian corps of engineers from shingle bank to shingle bank, till they had crossed the main channel of the river, reached Grave di Papadopoli, surprised the garrison, and occupied the northern half of the island. There they hung on for two days, and on the night of the 25th were joined by other

Italian and British troops, who mastered the rest of the place. All day on the 26th they were heavily bombarded, but they were able to begin the bridging of the main Piave channel behind them, and make other preparations for the coming attack.

Meantime, on Thursday, the 24th, the Grappa battle had begun. It was such a holding fight as the British and Greeks had fought at Lake Doiran a month before during the Balkan advance, and, like most holding battles, it was costly to the attack. The Italian bombardment began at five in the morning, and at 7.15 the infantry advanced in wild weather between the Brenta and the Piave. The enemy resisted stoutly, and positions were lost and recaptured many times, especially in the Pertica area and in the Solarolo salient. This stubborn fighting endured through the 25th and 26th; and by the evening of the latter day, though Giardino had not advanced far, he had taken 4,000 prisoners. The action had the effect of misleading the Austrian command. This, it seemed, was the main offensive, and there was no danger on the Piave front, where the river ran in roaring spate. But by the morning of the 26th Cavan had the whole island of Grave di Papadopoli, and that night at 11.30 the artillery of the Twelfth, Eighth, and Tenth Armies began their "preparation." The firing of British guns gave warning that there had been a change in Diaz's old dispositions which the enemy's Intelligence Service had not foreseen.

With the bombardment the rain began, and all night it poured, so that it seemed as if the weather which had saved Italy the year before was now likely to save Austria. But with the dawn it changed, and the rest of the battle was fought under clear autumn skies. At 6.45 on Sunday, the 27th, the Tenth Army attacked from its position on the island of Grave across the eastern channel of the Piave. The current was very strong, and it was hard for heavily-laden troops to keep their feet; but by the evening the British 14th Corps on the left, and the Italian 11th Corps on the right had won a considerable stretch of the eastern shore, and bridges were being rapidly built behind them. On the left, in the Montello section, the Eighth Army, under Caviglia, got a division beyond the river, but it failed to cross at the junction with the British, and there was a gap of ten kilometres between the bridgeheads held by the two armies. Farther north the Twelfth Army, under Graziani, was fighting its way up the Piave gorge towards Feltre, to turn the flank of the Austrians on the Grappa. The Monte Cosen ridge above Feltre was the immediate object of Graziani's Alpini.



The difficulties of the Eighth Army bridgehead on the night of the 27th made the situation serious, and Diaz took a bold step. He withdrew the 18th Corps from Caviglia and allotted it to Cavan, so that it might be passed over the British bridges and clear the front of the Eighth Army. General Basso safely took two divisions of his corps across, but the weight of the traffic and the strength of the flood broke down the bridge behind him, so that he could not complete his deployment. Nevertheless, on the morning of the 28th, with such troops as he had on the east bank, Basso advanced in line with Cavan, and by the evening the Tenth Army had pushed its patrols up to the river Monticano. This broke the resistance opposite Caviglia, and that night the Eighth Army got its right over the Piave at Nervesa, and the 18th Corps was returned to it next morning. Meantime Graziani had pushed up the Piave as far as Alano.

That night the crisis of the battle was past. On the 29th Cavan moved steadily forward, and reached the Monticano between Fontelle and Ramera. The fires which lit the eastern sky showed that the enemy was in full retreat. The Eighth Army was sweeping on to Vittorio, and had entered Conegliano. Early next morning the Twelfth Army was on Monte Cosen, and Feltre was under its fire. That day, Wednesday, the 30th, Diaz had driven his wedge fairly between the two halves of the Austrian front. Caviglia took Vittorio, and Cavan, who had now received the 332nd American Regiment, broke the improvised line of the Monticano and reached the Livenza at Francenigo and Sacile. In the words of the British commander's dispatch: "From this moment the retreat became a rout." The retirement had also begun in the mountains. Giardino found the resistance weakening on the Grappa, and the Sixth Army reoccupied Asiago. That day, too, the Duke of Aosta's Third Army entered the battle, and crossed the Piave everywhere between Cavan and the sea.

On the 31st the rout grew like an avalanche with its own movement, for, the enemy having once suffered defeat in the field, all the political and economic weakness of the past year combined to hasten his *débâcle*. The Czech and Polish battalions surrendered wholesale; even the Magyars showed themselves weary of war; only a few picked units kept their discipline and vigour. That day Cavan was across the Livenza, and the Duke of Aosta, on his right, was advancing swiftly to the lower reaches of that stream. The Sixth and Fourth Armies were moving forward in the hills, the Twelfth was fighting in the gorge of Quero, the Eighth was





VITTORIO VENETO.  
(F. A. 1907)



pressing on Consiglio and Pordenone. "The hostile masses," said the Italian *communiqué*, "are thronging into the mountain valleys or struggling to reach the crossings of the Tagliamento. Prisoners, guns, material, stores, and depots almost intact are being left in our hands."

On 1st November the Grappa front collapsed. Graziani was past the Quero gorge and close on Feltre, Caviglia's left wing was nearing Belluno, Cavan was beyond the Livenza, and the Italian cavalry were far to the east, riding down the retreat. On the 3rd Cavan was on the Tagliamento; on the 4th he was across it. On the evening of the 2nd the British 48th Division, on the Asiago plateau, having carried Monte Catz and Monte Mosciagh, bivouacked on Austrian soil. By the afternoon of the 4th the Sixth Army was far over the watershed, and in the eastern outskirts of Trent itself. The Austrian armies had collapsed, and left in the conqueror's hands one-third of their total infantry and all their guns. Caporetto had been amply avenged.

Those were strange days for the triumphant soldiers of Italy. When they crossed the enemy's lines they passed into a land like a wild dream. Roads were in ruins; war material stood rusting by the wayside, as if there had been insufficient labour to use it; the neglected hospitals were in chaos. Everywhere was the proof that Austria had long been dying at the heart. The countryside was bare of food, and the wretched villagers were starving. Long lines of broken men, Italian prisoners taken the year before, were stumbling westward to their homes, but already 100,000 of these prisoners had perished of want. Austria's military adventure had ended not in a tragic cataclysm but in a nightmare of senile decay.

On the night of 2nd November there was a continuous murmur of shouting to be heard along the Italian front. It was the news of the first step of the enemy towards capitulation. On 27th October, in reply to the American Note of the 18th, the Government of Vienna accepted all Mr. Wilson's conditions, and "declared itself ready, without awaiting the results of other negotiations, to commence negotiations for peace between Austria-Hungary and the opposing States, and for immediate armistice on all Austro-Hungarian fronts." On the first day of November the Vatican, mindful of the interests of that unhappy daughter of the Church, appealed to Britain in support of Austria's plea for a separate peace. "After a request of this nature, the cessation of the sanguinary conflict appears to be imperiously called for by

every principle of humanity." There was no need for the Allies to do as they had done with Germany, and refer Austria to the Italian High Command. Her bitter necessities did not allow her to waste time in *pourparlers*. On the evening of 29th October an Austrian officer appeared with a white flag near Ala in the Adige valley. He had no proper authority, and was sent back with a message that only a duly accredited mission would be received. On Wednesday, the 30th, the white flag appeared again, and an Austrian corps commander, General von Weber, with seven other plenipotentiaries, crossed the Italian lines. Next day they were taken to a villa near Diaz's headquarters, and on Sunday, 3rd November, the Italian Chief of Staff, General Badoglio, interviewed the mission and presented them with the Allied terms. These were promptly accepted, and at three o'clock on the afternoon of Monday, 4th November, the armistice came into effect, and hostilities ceased.

The events of that week were like mad changes of a kaleidoscope. On the last day of October two Italian sailors entered the inner roadstead at Pola and blew up the Austrian Dreadnought *Viribus Unitis*. It was a theatrical climax, for in that vessel, in June 1914, the Archduke Francis Ferdinand had travelled to the Dalmatian coast on the way to his death at Serajevo. On the evening of 3rd November a detachment of Bersaglieri landed at Trieste, and the city passed under the control of Italy. Meantime the fleet at Pola was surrendered to the Southern Slavs, and everywhere throughout the Dual Monarchy there was revolution. New transient Premiers — Lammasch at Vienna, Michael Karolyi at Budapest — flitted across the scene, to give place to councils of soldiers and republican committees. Agram, Laibach, and Prague became suddenly the capitals of new states and the seats of new *de facto* governments. On 1st November Tisza was murdered. He had been the last stalwart of the old régime, the last buttress of autocracy; narrow and fanatical both in his religious and political creeds, he was in many respects the strongest man in Central Europe, and his life was not without its stormy grandeur. He had played for high stakes and greatly failed, and it was of a piece with his character and career that he should go down with the sinking ship. The Emperor Charles at Schönbrunn was left alone in the palace that had once been so gay, where Joseph II. had dreamed his dreams for Europe, where Metternich had planned and whispered, where the Treaty of Vienna had been signed, where the old Francis Joseph had puzzled at the Whirligig of time. Gone

were the nobles, the clergy, the glittering staffs — not even a servant remained in the vast, silent corridors now stricken as if by enchantment into an ageless sleep.

The terms of the armistice\* put an end to Austria's army and navy, and placed all her territories at the disposal of the Allies for military operations. The vast straggling fortress of the Teutonic League had now been shorn of every outwork, and only the central keep of Germany remained. But that keep was already in desperate case, and was on the eve of hoisting the flag of surrender.

\* See Appendix, p. 448.



## CHAPTER CI

### THE SURRENDER OF GERMANY

*November 1–November 11, 1918*

Foch's Final Plans — The British take Valenciennes — Advance of Gouraud and Pershing — Haig clears Mormal Forest — German Emperor flees to the Army — Mutiny in German Fleet — German Peace Delegation chosen — Byng enters Maubeuge — The Belgians enter Ghent — Vervins and Rethel occupied — Debeney enters Hirson — Pershing at Sedan — Republic declared in Germany — Emperor flees to Holland — German Delegates reach Foch — The Terms — The Canadians at Mons — Armistice signed — The Last Day.

LUDENDORFF had gone, and the Supreme Command was in commission. His nominal successor was von Gröner, the Würtemberg general; but von Gröner was an administrator rather than a strategist, and such strategical direction as was still possible seems to have been in the hands of von Lossberg, formerly Chief of Staff to Armin's IV. Army in Flanders. Hindenburg contented himself with appeals for German unity; and the Emperor, who on 29th October sought refuge with Army Headquarters at Spa from the troubles of the capital, was in no position to interfere. He was occupied with adapting democratic tunes to the damaged trumpets of absolutism.

Foch was now on the eve of his last step in the West. He had to get Gouraud and Pershing forward so as to cut the Metz–Montméd–Mezières line, and limit the avenues of retreat for the army groups of the Bavarian and Imperial Crown Princes to the gap of Liège, and at the same time to push his British centre down the Sambre towards Namur, so as to make the retirement of the latter impossible. Then would come the final operation — the swinging of the American Second Army under Bullard north-eastward through the Woëvre on the ironfields of Briey, while at the same time Castelnau in Lorraine directed Mangin's Tenth Army,

which had been moved to the Moselle, against Château-Salins. Metz would thus be isolated, the Metz-Arlon-Namur railway would be cut, and the southern German armies shepherded into captivity. In such an event only a few beaten divisions would escape by the pass between Dutch Limburg and the Ardennes, and the most complete catastrophe in all history would have overtaken the German command.

Haig, having crossed the little streams between the Forest of Mormal and the Scheldt, was ready for his final movement. He was in the position of Wellington on the evening of Waterloo, when he raised his hat as a signal for "everything to go in." For three months the British armies had been locked in a continuous battle; for nearly ten months they had been in the forefront of the struggle. From 21st March to 27th October — a period of 218 days — it had only been possible to give the British divisions brief periods of rest out of the line, amounting on an average to 69 days in all, while the Australian average was 79 days, and the Canadian 102 days. During the same period the percentage of casualties to strength in the British divisions was 118 for officers and 121 for men.\* The strain had been colossal, but the reward was very near, and however great the weariness of the Allied troops, it was a small thing compared to the exhaustion of the enemy. The boys of the 1921 class, who had been called up for "national auxiliary service" in occupied territory, were being transferred to the fighting line, so that the ranks of Germany were becoming like the levies of France when in 1814 they fell back before Blücher and Schwarzenberg. But in this case the defeated armies had no Napoleon.

As a preliminary to the British advance, Valenciennes must fall. At 5.15 on the morning of 1st November, the Canadians and the 22nd Corps of Horne's First Army and the 17th Corps of Byng's Third Army attacked on a six-mile front south of the town. The struggle was sharp, and the enemy resisted strongly on the flooded banks of the river; but his defences had been constructed to meet an advance from the west, and the Canadians struck upward from the south. That afternoon four companies of Canadians entered Valenciennes from the west, and the 49th and 4th Divisions of the 22nd Corps crossed the Rhonelle. Next day, 2nd November, the 4th Canadians completed the capture of the city of Sir John Froissart, and the 22nd Corps was well beyond the

\* The Canadian figures were 97 per cent. and 84 per cent., the Australian 83 per cent. and 85 per cent.

Rhonelle, taking Maresches and Preseau, and the high ground two miles to the east. On the 3rd the Germans fell back on the front south of Valenciennes, and also north of Tournai; and there were signs of a more extensive withdrawal, since our drive south of the Scheldt had turned the line of the river, and was threatening the southern enemy front towards Avesnes. The moment was ripe for the last great British effort.

Meantime there was good news from the Allied right. On Friday, 1st November, Gouraud and Pershing went into action, the French attacking north and east of Vouziers, and the Americans advancing between Grand-Pré and the Meuse. Gouraud was thus able to take in flank the German divisions opposed to Pershing in the northern extension of the Argonne, called the Forest of Bourgonne. The attack was preceded by a gigantic bombardment, for new roads and railroads had been constructed behind the American front, and the supply of ammunition was now abundant. At last the American First Army reaped the fruit of its heroic labours, and broke clear of the desperate country of woods and pockets in which for weeks it had been fighting. The whole line swung forward. The 2nd Division in an hour took Landres-St. Georges, and before night had cleared the Bois de Barricourt, and advanced five miles; the 89th Division on its right, the men of the "Middle West," had marched abreast. The enemy resistance on the Meuse was collapsing. On Saturday, in stormy weather, Gouraud reached the south bank of the Ardennes Canal, and Pershing took Buzancy and Fosse. Next day the 5th Division on his right crossed the river and formed a bridgehead at Dun-sur-Meuse, and at night part of the 2nd Division marched in advance guard formation through the forests between Belval and Beaumont, surprised machine gunners asleep beside their posts, and by the morning was five miles inside the enemy lines — an exploit worthy of Stonewall Jackson. At last the shell of this stubborn defence had been cracked. In three days, on an eighteen-mile front, Pershing had advanced twelve miles. By the morning of Monday, the 4th, he held positions which enabled him to bring the railway at Montmédy and Longuyon under his fire.

On the morning of 4th November Haig delivered his attack on the thirty miles between Valenciennes and Oisy on the Sambre. He was moving against formidable defences — the canalized channel of the Sambre in the south; the great Mormal Forest in the centre; and on his left the fortifications of the town of Le Quesnoy, and the broken woody country intersected by many streams which lay



northward towards the Condé Canal. But his troops knew they were on the eve of victory, and were not to be checked by any defences. The battle opened at dawn, and presently all the German first position had fallen. It was the task of Rawlinson on the right to cross the Sambre south of the Mormal Forest, of Byng in the centre to clear the Forest itself, and of Horne to pass the marshes north of Valenciennes and advance east of the little river Aunelle. Meantime, Debeney, with the French First Army on Haig's right, was to advance to conform into the Forest of Nouvion and along the upper Oise. The whole plan moved like clockwork. The 9th Corps, on Rawlinson's right, took Catillon, in two hours was across the Sambre, and by the afternoon was well to the east of Fesmy in the south and La Folie in the north. The 13th Corps, attacking a little later with the 25th, 50th, and 18th Divisions, had a stiff fight with the German 1st Guard Reserve Division at the Sambre crossings near Landrecies. But ere nightfall the 25th Division had occupied the little town, where in the August dusk in the first month of war Haig's 1st Corps had faced the great sweep of the enemy from the Belgian frontier. In the Third Army area the 5th Corps fought its way into the pathless thickets of the Mormal Forest, and by dawn on the 5th had reached its eastern edge, taken the woodland village of Locquignol, and advanced a mile to the east of it. On its left the 37th and New Zealand Divisions of the 4th Corps swept through the northern part of the Forest, taking Jolimetz and Herbignies; and at four in the afternoon the garrison of Le Quesnoy, now hopelessly cut off, made its surrender. On their left, the 62nd Division took Orsinval and, advancing along with the Guards, carried Frasnoy and Preux-au-Sart, and reached the edge of Commegnies. The left corps of the Third Army, the 17th, met with less opposition, and by the evening was east of Bry and Eth and the two Wargnies, and so beyond the upper streams of the Aunelle. That day Horne, moving forward to conform, had his right well east of the Aunelle at Sebourg, while his Canadians were in the streets of Rombies.

It was a day of almost bewildering success. Twenty British divisions had scattered thirty-two German divisions, taking 19,000 prisoners and more than 450 guns. Nor was the success only in the central area. Debeney crossed the Sambre Canal on his whole front, and on the 5th was in Guise. The Belgians had driven Armin behind the Ghent-Terneuzen Canal and were closing in on Ghent. Plumer and Degoutte were fording the Scheldt. Guillaumat had breached the Hunding Line between Sissonne and

Condé-lez-Herpy, Gouraud had crossed the Ardennes Canal, and so turned the flank of the enemy in the Brunehilde Line between Attigny and Rethel. Pershing was continuing his brilliant advance, and the right wing of the American First Army was now moving forward on the east bank of the Meuse with a view to thrusting the enemy off the last of the heights into the plain. His van was at Pouilly, where he was only six miles from the bend north of Montmédy on the Metz railway.

On Tuesday, 5th November, the enemy's resistance was finally broken. Henceforth he was not in retreat but in flight. The two wings of his armies were separated for ever. The Hunding and Brunehilde and Kriemhilde zones had gone the way of the Siegfried. The opening of the pocket was now the fifty miles between Avesnes and Mezières, and through this gut the whole remaining German forces in the south must squeeze if they would make good their escape. But that gut was hourly narrowing. Gouraud and Pershing were approaching Mezières; Debeney and Guillaumat were pressing towards Hirson, with nothing to bar the road; while Haig, now east of the Mormal Forest, had the Sambre valley as an avenue to Namur. Moreover, Foch had still his trump card to play, the encircling swing of his right by way of Metz to close the last way of escape. If a negotiated armistice did not come within a week there would be a *de facto* armistice of complete collapse and universal surrender.

During that week in Germany the mutterings of the storm of revolution were growing louder. Some issued heated appeals for a patriotic closing up of ranks in a last stand against the coming disaster; others attempted to make a scapegoat of the fallen Ludendorff; and everywhere was apparent a rising anger against the Imperial House. The Emperor had fled to the army, but the army was in no case to protect him. The Social Democrats in the Government, led by Scheidemann, were clamouring for his instant abdication, and they had the support of the great mass of the people. Everywhere there reigned a frantic fear of invasion, especially in Bavaria, where the collapse of Austria made the populace expect to see at any moment the victorious Italians in their streets; and invasion was no cheerful prospect to Germany when she remembered her own method of conducting it, and reflected that for four years she had been devastating the lands and dragooning the peoples of the Powers now marching to her borders.

Strange things, too, were happening within her own confines.

In the first days of November the stage had been set for a great sea battle. Her High Sea Fleet was ordered out, but it would not move. The dry-rot, which had been growing during the four years' inaction, had crumbled all its discipline. "Der Tag" had come, but not that joyous day which her naval officers had toasted. She had broken the unwritten laws of the deep sea, and she was now to have her reward. On 4th November the red flag was hoisted on the battleship *Kaiser*. The mutiny spread to the Kiel shipyards and workshops, where there had always been a strong socialist element; a council of soldiers, sailors, and workmen was formed; and the mutineers captured the barracks, and took possession of the town. The trouble ran like wildfire to Hamburg, Bremen, Lubeck, and adjacent ports, and it was significant that in every case the soldiers and sailors took the lead. Deputations of Social Democrats were sent down post-haste by the Government, and succeeded in temporarily restoring order, but the terms on which peace was made were the ruin of the old Régime. In Cologne, in Essen, and in other industrial centres there were grave disturbances, and everywhere the chief outcry was against the Emperor and the Hohenzollerns. He who had been worshipped as a god, because he was the embodiment of a greater Germany, was now reviled by a nation disillusioned of dreams of greatness. At the same time the Empire was dissolving at its periphery. The Polish deputies from Posen and Silesia seceded from the Reichstag, and Schleswig demanded liberation.

It was hard to tell where in Germany now lay the seat of power. On the 5th the Army Command invited to Headquarters representatives of the majority parties in the Reichstag to discuss the next step, and search was made for military officers who might be least unacceptable to the Allies. On that day the Government at Washington transmitted to Germany, through Switzerland, the last word on the matter of negotiations. This Note gave the reply of America's allies to the correspondence which had been formally submitted to them. They had accepted the President's Fourteen Points as a basis on which they were willing to negotiate peace — with two provisos: first, they reserved their own liberty of action on the question of the freedom of the seas, since that phrase was open to so many interpretations; second, by the word "restoration" in the case of invaded territories, they declared that they understood "compensation by Germany for all damage done to the civilian population of the Allies, and to their property by the aggression of Germany by land, by sea, and from the air." Mr.



Wilson signified his assent to these provisos, and announced that Marshal Foch had been authorized by all the Allies to receive properly accredited representatives of the German Government, and to communicate to them the terms of an armistice.

Germany made haste to choose her delegates. They were Erzberger, now a Secretary of State; General von Gündell, an old associate of Marschall von Bieberstein, and the German military delegate to the Hague Conference of 1907; Count Oberndorff, sometime German Minister in Sofia; and General von Winterfeld, who had once been military attaché in Paris, and had recently acted as Falkenhause's Chief of Staff at Brussels. The Allied plenipotentiary was Foch, who had associated with him Sir Rosslyn Wemyss, the British First Sea Lord, to represent the British Navy. On the afternoon of Wednesday, the 6th, the German delegates left Berlin, Foch having directed them by wireless to approach the French outposts by the Chimay-Fourmies-La Capelle-Guise road. That day Prince Max of Baden, as Imperial Chancellor, issued an appeal to his people that negotiations might not be endangered by indiscipline. "For more than four years the German nation, united and calm, has endured the severest sufferings and sacrifices of war. If at the decisive hour, when only absolute unity can avert from the whole German people the greatest dangers for its future, our internal strength gives way, then the consequences cannot be foreseen. The indispensable demand which must be made in this crisis by any people's Government is the maintenance of the calm which has hitherto prevailed under voluntary discipline."

We leave the delegates on their embarrassed journey, while we review the last days of the Allied advance.

Let us look first at the British centre. Before Haig, if anywhere, the Germans must attempt a stand, for he was marching straight for Namur and the one narrow door still open to their frontiers. No soldier will withhold his tribute of admiration to the gallantry of a foe, and the stubborn valour of the soldiers of Germany had never shone brighter than now. During those desperate days her armies still made forlorn attempts at resistance to gain for other parts of the line a little respite.\* But it was like the

\* Some idea of the straits to which the Germans were reduced and their stalwart efforts to hold back the advance may be gathered from a study of the enemy divisions engaged by the British in the operations of our First, Third, and Fourth Armies between 27th September and 11th November. For example, the 25th Reserve, which had been relieved in the beginning of October, came into action again on 5th October. The 20th and the Jäger Divisions appeared for a second time on 8th October, and that day the 25th Reserve fought

efforts of a mop to stay the advance of the ocean. The great victory of 4th–5th November had opened the roads of the Condé Canal and the Sambre valley. On the 5th Rawlinson advanced four miles beyond Prisches and Maroilles, while that evening Byng was approaching Bavai, which had been French's headquarters at the start of the Battle of Mons. Horne had a harder day. His 22nd Corps crossed the Belgian frontier, but was held up for some time in front of the village of Angre and the line of the Honnelle stream. Next day, Wednesday, 6th November, Horne broke down the resistance, took Angre, and crossed the Honnelle, while the Canadians captured Quiévrechain. That night came another enemy landslide, and early on the morning of the 7th the Guards Division of Byng's army entered Bavai. On the 8th Rawlinson occupied Avesnes, and Byng took Hautmont, and reached the outskirts of Maubeuge.

In those days the weather was wet and chilly, very different from the bright August when British troops had last fought in that region. The old regular forces which had then taken the shock of Germany's first fury had mostly disappeared. Many were dead or prisoners or crippled for life, and the rest had been dispersed through the whole British army. The famous first five divisions of the Retreat from Mons were in the main new men. But some were there who had fought steadily from the Sambre to the Marne, and back again to the Aisne, and then for four years in bitter trench battles, and who now returned after our patient fashion to their old campaigning ground. Even the slow imagination of the British soldier must have been stirred by that strange revisiting.\* He was approaching places which in 1914 had been

stubbornly at Sequehart. The 6th and 185th Divisions appeared for the second time on 9th October, the 1st Guard Reserve for the second time on 20th October. On 24th October the Jäger, 113th, 18th Reserve, and 221st Divisions appeared for the third time; on 1st November the 6th and 34th; on 2nd November the 54th, and on 4th November the 1st Guard Reserve — all for the third time. That day this last division fought stoutly at Landrecies. The Jäger Division on 4th November, and the 18th Reserve on 5th November, appeared for the fourth time. During this battle the British had sixty-one divisions to face, and these divisions had the following record:—

30	divisions engaged	once.
21	"	" twice.
8	"	" thrice.
2	"	" four times.

\* "Juvat ire et Dorica castra

Desertosque videre locos litusque relictum.

Hic Dolopum manus, hic saevus tendebat Achilles,

Classibus hic locus, hic acie certare solebant."

VIRGIL, *Aen.* II., 27–30.

no more than names to him, half-understood names heard dimly in the confusion of that great retreat. But some stood out in his memory — the fortress of Maubeuge, on which France had set such store; above all, the smoky coal pits of Mons, which had become linked for ever in the world's mind with the old "Contemptibles." Then he had been marching south in stout-hearted bewilderment, with the German cavalry pricking at his flanks. Now he was sweeping to the north-east on the road to Germany, and far ahead his own cavalry and cyclists were harassing the enemy rout, while on all the packed roads his airmen were scattering death.

On the night of the 7th the thrust of the Fourth, Third, and First Armies bore fruit in the north. The line of the Scheldt broke. Horne's left corps, the 8th, and Birdwood's right corps, the 1st, crossed the river south of Antoing on the 8th, and took Condé. This was the end of the Tournai bridgehead, and that evening Birdwood occupied the western part of the ancient city. On the 9th the Guards entered Maubeuge, while the Canadians with Horne were sweeping along the Condé Canal towards Mons. Birdwood cleared Tournai and took Peruwelz, and Plumer crossed the Scheldt on his whole front and reached Renaix. Next day the Belgians had Ghent.

In the south the advance of the Allies was still more rapid, for Debeney, Guillaumat, and Gouraud had little before them, and Pershing's gallant Americans had the reward of their fierce October struggle. On the 6th Debeney advanced six miles, passed the Forest of Nouvion, and entered Vervins, while Gouraud took Rethel, and Pershing's First Army crept down both sides of the Meuse nearer to the Metz railway. It was a race for the three points of Hirson, Mezières, and Sedan. On the evening of the 6th the vanguard of the American First Army, the redoubtable 1st Division, after a wonderful forced march of thirty-eight miles in thirty hours, reached that part of the town of Sedan which lies in the meadows on the west bank of the Meuse. On the 8th the right of the American First Army east of the river — the American 3rd Corps and the French 2nd Colonial and 17th Corps — completed its conquest of the Heights of the Meuse. On the 9th Debeney entered Hirson. But indeed the record of places captured was now meaningless; over much of the battlefield the advance was limited only by the weariness of marching infantry. On the 10th — from north to south — Plumer was well beyond the Scheldt, and approaching the Dendre Canal; Birdwood was across that canal, and had taken Ath; Horne was on the Condé Canal west and





# WESTERN THEATRE OF WAR

## THE SUCCESSIVE STAGES OF THE GERMAN RETREAT

MAY 1<sup>ST</sup> — NOV. 11<sup>TH</sup> 1918.

German Lines.....shown thus.....  
Land over 750 feet.....

Scale.  
0 5 10 20 30 40 50 MILES

THE VICTORY IN THE WEST.  
(Facing p. 410.)

# THE VICTORY IN THE WEST.

(Book V. 401)





north-west of Mons; Byng and Rawlinson were far down the Sambre and close on the Belgian frontier; Debeney had reached the Belgian frontier at Chimay; Rocroi had been occupied, as had Mezières and Charleville (the old seat of the German High Command in the West); while the centre of the American First Army had crossed the Meuse at Stenay, and its right was well into the Woëvre plain. This was on Sunday, the 10th; for Thursday, the 14th, Foch had fixed the great sweep of the American Second and the French Tenth Armies north-eastward between the Meuse and the Moselle.

These were feverish days both for the victors and the vanquished. Surrender hung in the air, and there was a generous rivalry among the Allies to get as far forward as possible before it came. This was specially noted among the British troops, who wished to finish the war on the ground where they had started. Take as an instance the 8th Division in Horne's First Army. It had spent the winter in the Ypres salient; it had done gloriously in the retreat from St. Quentin; it had fought in the Third Battle of the Aisne; and from the early days of August it had been hotly engaged in the British advance. Yet now it had the vigour of the first month of war. On the 10th of November one of its battalions, the 2nd Middlesex, travelled for seven hours in busses, and then marched twenty-seven miles, pushing the enemy before them. They wanted to reach the spot near Mons where some of them (then in the 4th Middlesex) fired almost the first British shots in the war, and it is pleasant to record that they succeeded. Likewise the 2nd Royal Irish, who had fought with the 3rd Division in the loop of the canal north-east of Mons on August 26, 1914, were, with the 63rd Division, entering the same loop on the last day of war.

Meantime in Germany the conventions which for generations had held her civilian people were patently dissolving. There were few mutinies like that of the northern ports. The old authorities simply disappeared, quietly, unobtrusively, and the official machine went on working without them. Kings and courts tumbled down, and the various brands of socialists met together, gave themselves new names, and assumed office. There was as yet nothing which approached a true revolution, nothing which involved a change of spirit. Deep down in the ranks of the people there was a dull anger and disquiet, but for the moment it did not show itself in action. They stood looking on while the new men shuffled the



old cards. It was everything to these new men that they should establish a stable Government with which the Allies would be disposed to deal, and to preserve stability they must carry on the existing machine. Germany with her lack of training in responsible popular government could not improvise a new order in a night. Throughout the land there was a sporadic formation of workmen's and soldiers' councils, but as yet these meant little, and were well under control.

But it was essential for Germany to get rid of the signposts of the old régime. Bavaria took the lead, and on Friday, the 8th, a meeting of a workmen's and soldiers' council, under the leadership of a Polish Jew, Kurt Eisner, decreed the abolition of the Wittelsbach dynasty. In Frankfort, Cologne, Leipzig, Bremen, Hanover, Augsburg, and elsewhere, similar councils were formed, who took upon themselves the preservation of order, and declared that they held their power in trust for the coming German Socialist Republic. So far there had been few signs of despotic class demands on the Russian model; in most places the change was made decently and smoothly. Saturday, the 9th, saw the crowning act in the capital. Bands of soldiers and enormous assemblies of workmen patrolled the streets, singing republican songs. There was a little shooting, and a certain number of windows were broken. Soldiers flung away their badges and iron crosses; everywhere the royal arms were torn down, and red flags fluttered from the balcony of the Imperial Palace, whence, in the first week of August 1914, the Emperor had addressed his loyal people. The day before most of the civil Ministers like Solf and Delbrück had gone to Army Headquarters. Berlin was in the hands of a workmen's and soldiers' council; but, contrary to expectation, there was no friction with the troops. The latter had been brought into the city in great numbers with many machine guns; but by the early afternoon they were fraternizing with the workmen's processions, and Liebknecht was making an oration from the Castle balcony. General von Linsingen, the officer commanding in the Mark of Brandenburg, resigned, and Prince Max issued a decree announcing the appointment as Chancellor of Fritz Ebert, a Majority Socialist, who, like Cleon, was in private life a merchant of leather.

The two Socialist groups had come together, and a Council of National Plenipotentiaries was formed, consisting of three from the Majority and three from the Minority. For the moment the extremists of the Spartacus sect, led by Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg, were quiet and biding their time. The revolution

had been largely made by reservists, the older men in the home garrisons, who were not imbued with the wilder doctrines. Some kind of "soviets" had been necessary to give impetus to the change, but the new "People's Government" hoped to absorb them in an orderly democracy. They appealed to all the stable elements in the people to safeguard the transition, and announced to the world that Bolshevism had no partisans in their nation. At the moment it looked as if they might succeed. Berlin took the revolution with complete placidity. Before nightfall on the Saturday the normal life of the city had been resumed, and on the Sunday crowds as usual visited the Karlshorst racecourse.

Yet, orderly as was the first stage in Germany's revolution, and strenuous as were the efforts made to provide administrative continuity, on one side the revulsion was complete. The old absolutism was gone, and monarchy within the confines of Germany had become a farce — hated in some regions, in all despised as an empty survival. For centuries the pretensions of German kinglets had made sport for Europe. Now these kinglets disappeared, leaving no trace behind them. In Bavaria, Saxony, Württemberg, the Mecklenburgs, Hesse, Brunswick, Baden, the dynasties fell with scarcely a protesting voice. And with them fell the men who had been the pillars of the thrones, the great nobles and the industrial magnates who had risen to power by courtiership. On the Sunday morning came the news of the death of Ballin, the prophet of Germany's commercial expansion, and one of the main abettors of her megalomania. He chose not to outlive the fabric which he had given his life to build.

With the lesser fell the greater. In Prince Max's decree of Saturday, the 9th, it was announced that the Emperor had decided to abdicate, and that the Imperial Crown Prince renounced the succession. With a revolution behind him and his conquerors before him, there was no place left for the Kaiser. He did not stand upon the order of his going. On Sunday, the 10th, he left Main Headquarters at Spa, crossed the Dutch frontier, and sought refuge in the house of Count Bentinck at Amerongen. Prince Rupprecht retired to Brussels to await the victors, and the Imperial Crown Prince fled from his armies, and, like his father, found sanctuary in Holland.

History has not often recorded a fall from greater heights to greater depths. The man who had claimed to be the vicegerent of God on earth, and had arrogated to himself a power little short of the divine, now stole from the stage like a discredited player.

Other kings and leaders who have failed have gone down dramatically in the ruin they made, but this actor of many parts had not the chance of such an exit. His light, emotional mind and his perverse vanity had plagued the world for a generation, and had now undone the patient work of the builders of Germany. Tragic, indeed, was the cataclysm of German hopes, and tragic, but in a lesser sense, was the fall of William the Second, King of Prussia, Margrave of Brandenburg, and Count of Hohenzollern. Like Lucian's Peregrinus, his life had been dominated by a passion for notoriety; but, unlike that ancient charlatan, he could not round off his antics on a public pyre. In fleeing from his country he did the best he could for his country's interests, and no humane man will wish to exult over the spectacle of broken pride and shattered dreams. In such an end his *ἔβρις* had received the most terrible of retributions.

The German delegates, who left Berlin on the afternoon of Wednesday, the 6th, arrived in the French lines at ten o'clock on the Thursday night, and were given quarters in the château of the Marquis de Laigle at Francport, near Choisy-au-Bac. On Friday morning they presented themselves at the train in the Forest of Compiègne which contained Marshal Foch and Sir Rosslyn Wemyss. The French Marshal asked, "Qu'est-ce que vous désirez, Messieurs?" and they replied that they had come to receive the Allied proposals for an armistice. To this Foch answered that the Allies did not propose any armistice, but were content to finish the war in the field. The delegates looked nonplussed, and stammered something about the urgent need for the cessation of hostilities. "Ah," said Foch, "I understand — you have come to seek an armistice." Von Gündell and his colleagues admitted the correction, and explicitly asked for an armistice. They were then presented with the Allied terms, and withdrew to consider them, after being informed that they must be accepted or refused within seventy-two hours — that is to say, before eleven o'clock on the morning of Monday, the 11th. They asked for a provisional suspension of hostilities, a request which Foch curtly declined.

The delegates declared that they were astonished at the severity of the terms, and sought permission to communicate with Berlin. A courier bearing the text of the armistice was dispatched to Main Headquarters at Spa, and the German Command was informed by wireless of his coming. He was to cross the French lines that night between six and eight o'clock. The French fire ceased



according to arrangement, but the unfortunate messenger had to wait long before the German barrage stopped. It was not till the afternoon of the following day that he could enter the German zone. Once there, he found everything in chaos. The retreating armies had made such havoc of roads and bridges that his car could with difficulty proceed, and he did not reach Spa till ten o'clock on the Sunday morning.

The terms were immediately telephoned to Berlin, and a conference of the new Government was held that morning. The hours of grace were fast slipping away, and Foch was adamant about the time limit. The delegates were instructed to accept, and after a protest they submitted to the inevitable. At five o'clock on the morning of Monday, 11th November, the armistice was signed, and Foch telegraphed to his generals: "Hostilities will cease on the whole front as from 11th November, at eleven o'clock. The Allied troops will not, until a further order, go beyond the line reached on that date and at that hour."

The terms were so framed as to give full effect to the victory on land and sea which the Allies had won.\* All invaded territory, including Alsace-Lorraine, was to be immediately evacuated, and the inhabitants repatriated. Germany was to surrender a large amount of war material, specified under different classes. The Allies were to take control of the left bank of the Rhine and of three bridgeheads on the right bank in the Cologne, Coblenz, and Mainz districts, and a neutral zone was to be established all along that bank between Switzerland and the Dutch frontier. A great number of locomotives and other forms of transport were to be immediately delivered to the Allies. All Allied prisoners of war were to be repatriated forthwith, but not so German prisoners in Allied hands. German troops in Russia, Rumania, and Turkey were to withdraw within the frontiers of Germany as these existed before the war. The treaties of Brest Litovsk and Bucharest were cancelled. German troops operating in East Africa were to evacuate the country within one month. All submarines were to repair to certain specified ports and be surrendered; certain units of the German Fleet were to be handed over to the charge of the Allies, and the rest to be concentrated in specified German ports, disarmed, and placed under Allied surveillance, the Allies reserving the right to occupy Heligoland to enforce these terms. The existing blockade was to be maintained. . . . Such were the main provisions, and the duration of the armistice was fixed at thirty-

\* See Appendix, p. 451.

six days, with an option to extend. If Germany failed to carry out any of the clauses, the agreement could be annulled on forty-eight hours' notice. The acceptance of such terms meant the surrender of Germany to the will of the Allies, for they stripped from her the power of continuing or of renewing the war.

There were those at the time — and there have been many since — who held that the Armistice should not have been granted. The German armies were broken and in flight; the whole organization behind their lines had fallen in pieces; railways, canals, and roads were blocked with congested or derelict transport. It would have been better for the Allies, it has been argued, to push their victory to its natural consequence, force the enemy to unconditional surrender in the field, or pursue him across the Rhine and shatter the last remnants of Germany's military dream by appearing as conquerors on her soil. The human mind loves a dramatic *finale*, and asks for the ostensible signs of victory. But to such an argument there are two replies. The Germans were indeed beaten, but the Allies were not far from the limits of their strength, and before a further advance could be made would have been compelled to halt and re-form, and so give the enemy a breathing-space. In a month or two they would have achieved their purpose, but it would have been at the cost of further losses. The encircling movement at Metz fixed by Foch for the 14th would certainly have succeeded, but the fruit of it could not have been immediately reaped by the main armies, for, except for Haig's two divisions of cavalry, they were not in a position for swift pursuit. The railway systems of France and Belgium had been strained to their uttermost; the enemy had destroyed most of the communications in the evacuated districts; in the British area railhead was nowhere less than thirty-five miles behind the front, and the distance had to be bridged by motor transport over damaged roads; while behind the French lines the situation was worse. The Allies were not in a position for a rapid and sustained advance. That is one justification for the grant of an armistice. The second is that the request could not decently have been refused, when it gave to the Allies all that they desired — all, indeed, that Germany could give. No honest man could for the sake of a more dramatic close condemn many thousands more to death and suffering. The Armistice had all the substance of an unconditional surrender, except that it was negotiated before the hands of the fighting men were formally held up in the field.

It is necessary to be clear as to the exact significance of the

terms of capitulation, for strange conditions have since been read into them by critics of Allied policy. These terms meant precisely what they said — so much and no more. Mr. Wilson's Fourteen Points were not a part of them; the Armistice had no connection with any later treaties of peace. It may be argued with justice that the negotiations by the various Governments between 5th October and 5th November involved a declaration of principles by the Allies which they were morally bound to observe in the ultimate settlement. But such a declaration bore no relation to the Armistice. That was an affair between soldiers, a thing sought by Germany under the pressure of dire necessity to avoid the utter destruction of her armed manhood. It would have come about though Mr. Wilson had never indited a single note. In the field since 15th June Germany had lost to the British armies 188,700 prisoners and 2,840 guns; to the French, 139,000 prisoners and 1,880 guns; to the Americans, 44,000 prisoners and 1,421 guns; to the Belgians, 14,500 prisoners and 474 guns. In the field, because she could not do otherwise, she made full and absolute surrender.

The morning of Monday, 11th November, was cold and foggy, such weather as a year before had been seen at Cambrai. The front was for the most part quiet, only cavalry patrols moving eastwards in touch with the retreat. But at two points there was some activity. The American First and Second Armies east of the Meuse were advancing, and the day opened for them with all the accompaniments of a field action. The famous 26th Division of New England, which had now been nine months in the field, closed its career with the capture of Ornes. At Mons, on the Sunday night, the Canadians of Horne's First Army were in position round the place. Fighting continued during the night, and at dawn the 3rd Canadian Division entered the streets and established a line east of the town, while the carillons of the belfries played "Tipperary." For Britain the circle was now complete. In three months her armies had gained seven victories, each greater than any in her old wars, and had broken the heart of their enemy. To their great sweep from Amiens to Mons was due in large degree the triumph which Foch had won, and on that grey November morning their worn ranks could await the final hour with thankfulness and pride.

The minutes passed slowly along the front. An occasional shell, an occasional burst of firing, told that peace was not yet,



but there were long spells of quiet, save in the American area. Officers had their watches in their hands, and the troops waited with the same grave composure with which they had fought. Men were too weary and deadened for their imaginations to rise to the great moment, for it is not at the time, but long afterwards, that the human mind grasps the drama of a crisis. At two minutes to eleven, opposite the South African Brigade, which represented the easternmost point reached by the British armies, a German machine gunner, after firing off a belt without pause, was seen to stand up beside his weapon, take off his helmet, bow, and then walk slowly to the rear. Suddenly, as the watch-hands touched eleven, there came a second of expectant silence, and then a curious rippling sound which observers far behind the front likened to the noise of a light wind. It was the sound of men cheering from the Vosges to the sea.

After that peace descended on the long battlefield. A new era had come, and the old world had passed away.

## CHAPTER CII

### CONCLUSION

The Aftermath of War—The French occupy Alsace and Lorraine—The Bridgeheads on the Rhine—The British at Cologne—Surrender of the German Fleet—A Panoramic View of the War—Summary of the Main Stages—Germany's Great Achievement—Her Mistakes—Reasons for Allied Victory—A War of the Rank and File—The Allied Civilian Leaders—Foch—Haig—Gain and Loss in War—The True Internationalism—Difficulties of Reconstruction—The Offering of Youth.

#### I

VICTORY dawned upon a world over-weary, and not inclined for extreme demonstration. Relief rather than jubilation was the note, and among the Allies the rejoicings were curiously restrained, as if the memory of the long suspense and the uncounted losses was too keen to permit of extravagance. Youth, indeed, will always be served, and during the nights of that week, when the streets of London and Paris shone with unfamiliar light, there was much harmless exuberance on the part of boys and girls and young soldiers. In the dull November weather there was a perpetual dancing on the causeways, the blowing of every instrument musical and unmusical, and the promenading of crowds in all forms of conveyance. There were gatherings before the houses of Ministers, and solemn scenes of rejoicing in the different legislatures. But the note everywhere was thankfulness rather than triumph. In Paris men would greet each other in the streets: "*C'est bien. Mon fils reviendra*"; and in London the churches were thronged by thanksgivers.

These days provided a dramatic illustration of the significance of monarchy in a free land. While elsewhere thrones had disappeared and their occupants were in exile, in Britain, Italy, and Belgium it was to their kings that the peoples turned as the representatives of the liberties for which they had fought. On Monday,

the 11th, great crowds assembled outside Buckingham Palace, moving thither from all quarters by a common impulse. The King and Queen appeared on the balcony to receive such an ovation as has rarely greeted the monarch of an unemotional people. Next day they went in solemn procession to St. Paul's to return thanks to the giver of victory. But the most impressive spectacle had taken place the evening before, when in the wet November twilight, almost unattended and wholly unheralded, they drove in a simple open carriage through the city of London. The merry-makers left their own occupations to cheer, and a crowd accompanied the carriage, running beside it and shouting friendly greetings. It was an incident which interpreted better than any formula the meaning of a people's king. He deserved the tribute, for he and his house had borne their part nobly in the struggle, unostentatiously performing hard and monotonous duties, sharing willingly in every national burden. On Tuesday, 19th November, in the Royal Gallery of the Palace of Westminster, he replied to the addresses of the two Houses of Parliament. There, in the presence of political leaders and the great officers of State, and representatives of India and all the Britains overseas, he expounded in simple words the gratitude of the nation to its fleets and armies for their achievement; the pride of Britain in her Allies; the unspectacular toil of the millions at home who had made victory possible; and the great task still before the nation if a better world was to be built out of the wreckage of the old. "In what spirit," he asked, "should we approach these great problems? How shall we seek to achieve the victories of Peace? Can we do better than remember the lessons which the years of war have taught, and retain the spirit which they instilled? In these years Britain and her traditions have come to mean more to us than they had ever meant before. It became a pleasure to serve her in whatever way we could, and we were all drawn by the sacredness of the cause into a comradeship which fired our zeal and nerved our efforts. This is the spirit we must try to preserve. It is on a sense of brotherhood and mutual goodwill, on a common devotion to the common interests of the nation as a whole, that its future prosperity and strength must be built up. The sacrifices made, the sufferings endured, the memory of the heroes who have died that Britain may live, ought surely to ennoble our thoughts and attune our hearts to a higher sense of individual and national duty, and to a fuller realization of what the English-speaking race, dwelling upon the shores of all the oceans, may yet accomplish for mankind."



The military terms of the armistice were intended to prevent any German army again taking the field. The two main means to this end were the surrender by the enemy of military equipment, and the occupation by the Allies of three bridgeheads on the Rhine. The first proceeded slowly and laboriously, as such things must, for the German machine was in dire disorder; the second advanced with steady precision. At first the German retirement beyond the Rhine was chaos — confused columns, a hundred miles long, of stragglers of every arm. Then discipline reasserted itself, and the last part of the retreat was conducted in good order. The defeated armies of Germany marched into their cities with bands playing and flags flying, and there was some attempt made to prepare for them a popular reception. No one dare grudge the effort of a conquered enemy to put a brave complexion on defeat, and those troops deserved a welcome, for they had fought with unsurpassed courage and resolution. But with the Allies following at their heels, it was hard to build up the legend that Germany had not suffered defeat in the field. If proof were needed, it was to be found in the condition of the hinterland of the old German front. Every road was littered with abandoned tractors, lorries, and tanks; every line was blocked with loaded trucks, and every canal with barges; everywhere there were huge dumps of war material, which could neither be used nor removed — not the war material surrendered under the terms of armistice, but material already derelict before the armistice was signed. On all sides was the proof that the German war-machine had fallen to pieces, and that it would not have needed Foch's projected encirclement of 14th November to complete the ruin.

The meaning of a bridgehead on a river is that the army occupying it commands the crossings, and has room to deploy on the farther bank. Of the three great bridgeheads, the northern — that of Cologne and Bonn — was to be occupied by the British troops; the central, at Coblenz, by the Americans; and the southern, at Mainz, by the French. The full meaning of victory was scarcely realized by the Allied armies during the week in which they waited quietly in their lines. They only knew that fighting had ceased, and that a great space now separated them from the enemy. It was cold, rimy weather, and the quiet under the grey skies seemed fantastic to those whose ears were accustomed to the unending din of battle. But when early on the morning of Sunday, 17th November, the advance began, there came a sudden awakening of all ranks to the tremendous thing that had been

achieved. Names long heard of as German headquarters took concrete form as towns and villages ; rivers, which once seemed as remote as the moon, were left behind them ; and daily they came nearer that mysterious land from which their enemy had issued. For four years they had fought him on their own soil ; they were now to visit his home as conquerors. The advance was slow, for the Germans had made a wonderful destruction of roads, bridges, and railways. It was a grim business, for the joy of the liberated inhabitants could not disguise the horrors of the enemy occupation, and everywhere our advancing troops met strings of returning prisoners, dazed and emaciated men cast loose by the enemy to find their way back. Yet pride was the dominant note, and the troops swung out on the road to the Rhine with well-groomed horses, polished harness-chains, spick-and-span guns and limbers, and every man smart and trim.

To the French was reserved the chief romance of the march, for they were entering their own lands of Lorraine and Alsace, which after forty-eight years they had freed. On the 17th the Moroccan Division passed through Château Salins ; at noon the Second Army, under General Hirschauer, was in Mulhouse ; and farther north, French troops, with what feelings may be guessed, crossed the battlefields of Gravelotte and Morhange. That day the Third American Army, under Major-General Dickman, left the tormented uplands of the Meuse behind them, passed through Longuyon and Conflans, and entered the frontier fortress of Longwy and the mining town of Briey. The 19th was an historic date. The King and Queen of the Belgians arrived at Antwerp, and that afternoon attended a *Te Deum* in the Cathedral. Belgian troops had last left it on the night of October 9, 1914, when smoke and flames made a pall as over some city of the Inferno. They returned to streets bright with flags and crowded with the cheering citizens whose days of torment were over. That day Mangin's Tenth Army entered Metz an hour after noon. Pétain, now a Marshal of France, rode at the head of them. Every house flew the tri-color of the Republic, and the roadways were lined by young girls in the quaint costume of Lorraine. The joy of Metz was to be measured by her long captivity, for she had been a prisoner not for four but for forty-eight years. About the same hour the troops under General Gérard entered Zabern.

On Wednesday, the 20th, the French reached the Rhine. Five days later King Albert made his solemn entry into Brussels, the capital which he abandoned in order to save his country. On the

23rd the American Third Army, advancing through Luxembourg, and led by the 1st Division, crossed the German frontier. On Monday, the 25th, the French entered Strassburg, the most dramatic moment of all. The troops chosen for the privilege were of the Fourth Army, under Gouraud. On August 10, 1914, when news reached Paris of the taking of Mulhouse, the Strassburg statue in the Place de la Concorde had been stripped of its crape, for the time of mourning was at an end. It was a true prophecy, though the Alsatian city had to wait four years for its fulfilment. Now the same statue was bright with gold and the three colours of the Republic, for the march of the deliverers was ended. Early in the afternoon came Pétain, in his long cavalry cloak, for the day was chilly, and took his stand in front of the Imperial Palace in the Kaiserplatz. Beside him stood Gouraud, with his empty right sleeve, the most romantic figure among the great captains of France; and the three group commanders, Castelnau, Fayolle, and Maistre. Then through the streets, where nearly every name was German and every flag was French, moved the men and guns of the Fourth Army. At first the occasion seemed too solemn for cheering, and there was little sound save from the drums and clarions of the regiments; but presently emotion broke forth, and the city became "one voice" around its deliverers.\*

By the middle of December the armies of the Allies had reached their goals; the tricolor guarded the mouth of the Main, and the stars and stripes flew above the city where the Moselle joins the Rhine, and over the dumb fortress of Ehrenbreitstein. If we seek for a parallel in drama to the French entry into Strassburg, we may find it in the passage of the great river by the British Second

\* That day there was posted up on the walls not the least finely inspired of the many great proclamations of France: —

"To the inhabitants of Strassburg,

"To the soldiers of the Fourth Army —

"The day of glory has arrived. After forty-eight years of tragic separation, after fifty-one months of war, the sons of Great France, our brothers, are united once more. This miracle has been wrought by you, people of Strassburg and men of Alsace, because you have kept in your faithful hearts the sacred love of the Mother Country through all the trials and indignities of the hated yoke. History will scarce furnish a like instance of such noble fidelity.

"This miracle has been wrought by you, soldiers, who have fought heroically the hardest battles ever known, and issued from them with immortal glory. The redoubtable barrier has fallen. The eagles of the frontier posts have been laid low for ever.

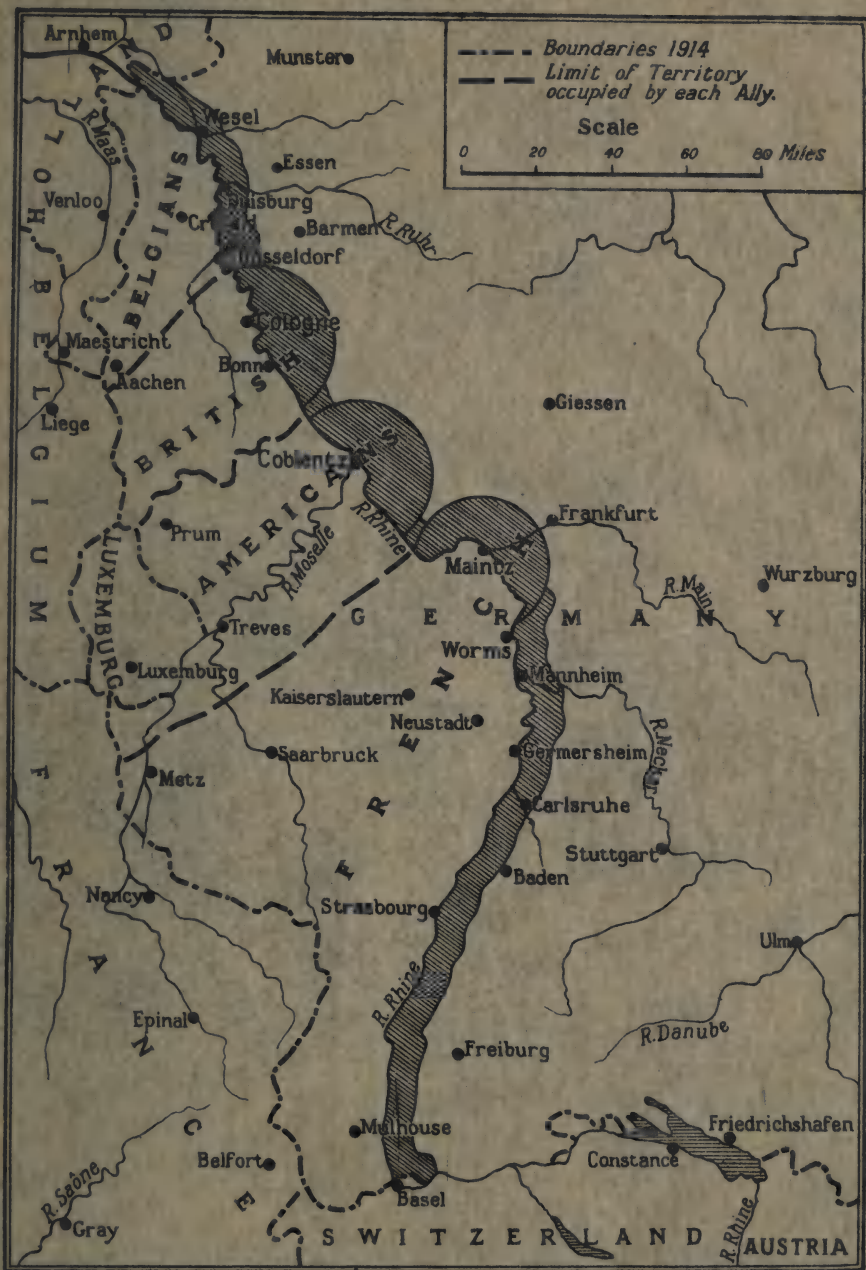
"France comes to you, people of Strassburg, as a mother to her darling child who has been lost and is found again. . . . At this solemn and magnificent hour, which proclaims the triumph of right, justice, and liberty, let us unite, liberated Alsations and liberating soldiers, in the same love."



Army. It took place on 13th December in heavy rain, the weather in which most of their battles had been fought. Six months before the British forces had been cooped up in a space of forty-five miles, between the enemy trenches and the Channel; now they were 250 miles east of Boulogne. The cavalry had already gone ahead, and on that morning it was the turn of the infantry. General Plumer took his stand at the great Hohenzollern Bridge at Cologne, and past him filed the 29th Division, the men of the Gallipoli landing and Cambrai. At the Nord Bridge, where Sir Charles Fergusson, the new Military Governor of Cologne, took the salute, the 9th Division crossed, the division which at Loos and Delville Wood, at Arras and Third Ypres, in the retreat from St. Quentin and in the desperate stand on the Lys, had won imperishable glory. Farther up stream, at the iron suspension bridge, the 1st Canadian Division was crossing; and the 2nd Canadians made the passage by the bridge of Bonn, in presence of Sir Arthur Currie. All the marching tunes of the British Empire were heard in the rain — the “Maple Leaf” and the “Men of Harlech,” “John Peel” and “Blue Bonnets.” There was no parade, no gaudy triumph, but in the lean efficiency of the men the watching crowd read a grim lesson of power. The handful of British soldiers who had been present at the start of the contest in 1914, and who now witnessed the end of the long road, may well have wavered in their minds between thankfulness and awe. For they were watching the consummation of a miracle, a miracle of patience, courage, and resolution. The little Expeditionary Force, small in numbers and small in the esteem of its opponents, had grown to almost the most formidable army that the world has seen. The words of Jacob might have been theirs: “With my staff I passed over this Jordan, and now I am become two bands.”

On Tuesday, 12th November, the Allied fleets, under Admiral Calthorpe, passed through the Dardanelles, and on the morning of the 13th arrived off Constantinople. It was the fourth time in a century that a British fleet had entered the Sea of Marmora. Behind them British and Indian troops garrisoned the Gallipoli forts, where so much good blood had been spilled in the enterprise at last concluded. The Black Sea was now under Allied control.

At 2.30 in the afternoon of Friday, 15th November, the German light cruiser *Königsberg* arrived at Rosyth, bringing Admiral Hugo von Meurer to arrange for the carrying out of the armistice con-



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## THE ALLIES ON THE RHINE.

(Facing p. 424.)





ditions. Von Meurer bore a good reputation as a sailor; he had been in command of the Dreadnought *König*, and had had charge of the last naval operations in the Gulf of Riga. He brought with him three delegates from the Sailors' and Soldiers' Council, and three from the People's Council. Under the terms of surrender all submarines were to be handed over, ten battleships, six battle cruisers, eight light cruisers, and fifty destroyers. These were to be disarmed and interned in neutral ports, or, failing that, in Allied ports; but the neutral Powers would have nothing to do with the business, so it fell to the Allies to receive them. The remaining surface warships left to Germany were to be concentrated in certain German ports, paid off and disarmed, and placed under the supervision of an Allied commission. The terms meant nothing less than the disappearance of German sea-power.

The conference between Admiral Beatty and Admiral von Meurer came to an end late in the evening of the 16th. The affair was conducted with all the punctilios of naval etiquette, and the German admiral departed into the fog which clouded the Firth of Forth with such formal salutes as might have attended a visit of officers of one great fleet to another. The humiliation of Germany was too dire to need expression by word or ceremony; the fact shouted itself throughout all the world. On Wednesday, the 20th, the handing over of the submarines began. The truth about them was now known from German admissions. For the past year their numbers had been steadily shrinking, new constructions had not covered losses, the best commanders had all been killed, and the crews were weak and mutinous. At a point thirty-five miles from the Essex coast Admiral Sir Reginald Tyrwhitt with five British light cruisers received the surrender of the first twenty U-boats. It was a fine morning, with a quiet sea and the sun shining through the mist, when the British seamen saw the low grey hulls, escorted by German transports, coming from the east. Only one submarine flew the German ensign, and all had their numbers painted out. They were navigated by their own crews till close to Harwich, when British officers took charge, the white ensign was run up above the solitary German flag, and the German sailors embarked on their transports to go home. A grimmer scene could scarcely be conceived. The enemy craft were received in silence by the British cruisers, who had their men at action stations and their guns trained on the newcomers. There was no hint of fraternization, scarcely a word was spoken, and the British sailors looked stolidly at the men who had disgraced their calling. A

hiss or a taunt would have been less insulting than that deadly stillness.

Next day, Thursday, the 21st, in the same ominous quiet, the German battleships and battle cruisers were handed over to the custody of the British Grand Fleet, which was accompanied by detachments of the French and American Navies. The event took place in the waters east of the mouth of the Firth of Forth. The four battle cruisers, which, with the *Seydlitz* now under repair, were all that remained to Germany, were the *Von der Tann*, *Derfflinger*, *Hindenburg*, and *Moltke*, and these were escorted to their place of internment by our First and Second Battle Squadrons. The battleships were the *König Albert*, *Kaiser*, *Kronprinz Wilhelm*, *Kaiserin*, *Bayern*, *Markgraf*, *Prinz Regent Luitpold*, *Grosser Kurfürst*, and *Friedrich der Grosse*, escorted by the Fourth and Fifth Battle Squadrons and the American Sixth Battle Squadron. The seven light cruisers were the *Karlsruhe*, *Frankfurt*, *Emden*, *Nürnberg*, *Brummer*, *Köln*, and *Bremse*,\* escorted by the 1st, 2nd, 3rd, and 6th Light Cruiser Squadrons and the 1st Cruiser Squadron. The rear of the procession was formed by the First and Second Battle Cruiser Squadrons and the 4th and 7th Light Cruiser Squadrons. In a few hours the main units of Germany's Fleet had passed out of her hands, and she, who in 1914 had been the second sea Power in the world had sunk to the state of a sixth or seventh-rate Power, while of what was left to her she had no longer the free use. Sir David Beatty ordered the surrendered vessels to haul down their flags at 3.37 that afternoon, and not to hoist them again without permission.

The armistice gave the Allies free access to the Baltic, and this involved mine-sweeping in German territorial waters, and the control of the enemy forts which protected the entrance to that sea. A flotilla of British minesweepers at once set out to clear the Kattegat; a British squadron followed them, and by 3rd December lay off Libau, where its presence was urgently needed owing to the Bolshevik advance. But if we seek for drama we can find it at its highest in the visit of the British warships, under Vice-Admiral Sir Montague Browning, to the German naval bases. Accompanied by naval representatives of the Allies, he set out on 3rd December in the *Hercules*, attended by four destroyers. A German pilot

\* For various reasons the full complement of ships due under the terms of the armistice could not be handed over on the 21st. It should be noted that of the light cruisers most were new constructions to take the place of ships of the same name sunk during the war.

party took them through the minefields, and they anchored off Wilhelmshaven after midday. There the German ships were inspected, and air stations, such as Borkum, Heligoland, Norderney, and Sylt, visited. The *Hercules* then passed through the Kiel Canal, and returning British prisoners on its banks had a glimpse of the white ensign. At Kiel the final details were settled, and on 18th December the *Hercules* left the Canal on her return voyage. . . . In June 1914, a British squadron had been in Kiel Bay, and British guns had hailed the final deepening of the great waterway. The Emperor had visited our flagship, and the flag at her masthead had proclaimed the presence on board of an Admiral of the British Fleet. At a subsequent banquet a German admiral had declared that his Navy sought to model itself upon the great example of Nelson! Such is the mutability of mortal things. The German sea-lords — Ingenohl, Scheer, Hipper — had disappeared into the darkness, and in a Dutch manor their master was waiting impotently while the Allies decreed his fate.

The cessation of hostilities left Germany a seething cauldron of rival factions and immature theories, and it was hard to tell from the froth and bubbles of incipient revolution what might be the outcome. But one fact was clear. Monarchical Germany was gone. On 28th November, from his refuge in Holland, the Emperor issued his signed abdication. Fourteen days earlier the Emperor Charles of Austria had bidden farewell to his uneasy throne. The old régime had disappeared in vapour; the old military chiefs had gone; and the decomposing armies were no longer in charge of princes.

Such was the immediate aftermath of war.

## II

To see the colossal turmoil as a whole, to present any kind of synoptic picture to the brain, is a task all but impossible for a contemporary, and it will scarcely be easier for posterity. All comparative tests fail us. It was so much the hugest war ever fought that it is idle to set it beside earlier conflicts. During its four years it depleted the world of life and wealth to a far greater degree than a century of the old Barbarian invasions. More than eight million men died in battle, and the casualties on all fronts were over thirty million. If we add deaths from disease and famine it cannot have cost the population of the globe less than twenty million dead, and as many more maimed and weakened for life.



Some forty thousand millions sterling of money were spent by the nations in the direct business of war. The losses in property were incalculable; a large part of the world's shipping had been destroyed, and the appurtenances of civilized life over millions of square miles of the globe's surface. And let it be remembered that this devastation has been wrought not in the loose and embryonic society of an elder world, but in one where each state was a highly-developed organism, where the economic fabric was intricate and far-extending, and where myriads of human souls depended for their existence on the mechanism of civilization performing its functions smoothly and in security.

No figures can bring before us the magnitude of the struggle, for they pass far beyond the limits of ordinary experience and become the empty symbols of a statistical abstract. Realization can be best attempted by recalling the geographical immensity of the battle-ground — a task which is for the imagination, since the soldier saw only his little area, and no man's experience could cover all the many fields. Only by some celestial intelligence, such as Mr. Hardy has presented in *The Dynasts*, was a synoptic view attainable. An observer on an altitude in the north, like the Hill of Cassel, on some evening in September 1918, could look east, and note the great arc from the dunes at Nieuport to the coal-fields about Lens lit with the flashes of guns and the glare of star-shells, and loud with the mutter of battle. That was a line of fifty miles — far greater than any battlefield in the old wars; but it was a mere fragment of the whole. Had he moved south to the ridge of Vimy he would have looked on another fifty miles of an intenser strife. South, again, to Bapaume, and he would have marked the wicked glow from Cambrai to the Oise. Still journeying, from some little height between the Oise and the Aisne he would have scanned the long front which was now creeping round the shattered woods of St. Gobain to where Laon sat on its hill. From the mounts about Rheims he might have seen Gouraud's battle-line among the bleak Champagne downs, and from a point in the Argonne the trenches of the Americans on both sides the Meuse, running into the dim woody country where the Moselle flowed towards Metz. Past the Gap of Nancy, and down the long scarp of the Vosges went the flicker of fire and the murmur of combat, till the French lines stretched into the plain of Alsace, and exchanged greetings with sentinels on the Swiss frontier. Such a battle-ground might well have seemed beyond the dream of mortals, and yet it was but a part of the whole.

A celestial intelligence, with sight unlimited by distance, would have looked eastward and, beyond the tangle of the Alps, witnessed a strange sight. From the Stelvio to the Adriatic ran another front, continuous through glacier-camps and rock-eyries and trenches on the edge of the eternal snows, to the pleasant foothills of the Lombard plain, and thence, by the gravel beds of the Piave, to the lagoons of Venice. Beyond the Adriatic it ran, through the sombre hills of Albania, past the lakes where the wild-fowl wheeled at the unfamiliar sound of guns, beyond the Tchernia and Vardar and Struma valleys to the Ægean shores. It began again, when the Anatolian peninsula was left behind, and curved from the Palestine coast in a great loop north of Jerusalem across Jordan to the hills of Moab. Gazing over the deserts, he would have marked the flicker which told of mortal war passing beyond the ancient valleys of Euphrates and Tigris, up into the wild Persian ranges. And scattered flickers to the north would have led him to the Caspian shores, and beyond them to that tableland running to the Hindu Kush which was the cradle of all the warring races. Passing north, his eyes would have seen the lights of the Allies from the Pacific coast westward to the Urals and the Volga, and little clusters far away on the shore of the Arctic ice.

Had the vision of such a celestial spectator been unhindered by time as well as by space, it would have embraced still stranger sights. It would have noted the Allied lines in the West, stagnant for months, then creeping on imperceptibly as a glacier, then wavering in sections like a curtain in the wind, and at last moving steadily upon Germany. It would have beheld the old Russian front from the Baltic to the Danube, pressing westward, checking, and falling east; breaking in parts, gathering strength, and again advancing; and at last dying like a lingering sunset into darkness. Behind would have appeared a murderous glow, which was the flame of revolution. Turning to Africa, it would have noted the slow movement of little armies in West and East and South — handfuls of men creeping in wide circles among the Cameroons jungles till the land was theirs; converging lines of mounted troopers among the barrens of the German South-West territory, closing in upon the tin shanties of Windhoek; troops of all races advancing through the mountain glens and dark green forests of German East Africa, till after months and years the enemy strength had become a batch of exiles beyond the southern frontier. And farther off still, among the isles of the Pacific and on the Chinese coast, it would have seen men toiling under the same lash of war.

Had the spectator looked seaward, the sight would have been not less marvellous. On every ocean of the world he would have observed the merchantmen of the Allies bringing supplies for battle. But in the North Atlantic, in the Mediterranean, and in the Channel and North Sea he would have seen uncanny things. Vessels would disappear as if by magic, and little warships would hurry about like some fishing fleet when shoals are moving. The merchantmen would huddle into packs with destroyers like lean dogs at their sides. He would have seen in the Scottish firths and among the isles of the Orkneys a mighty navy waiting and ships from it scouring the waters of the North Sea, while inside the fences of Heligoland lay the decaying monsters of the German Fleet. And in the air over land and sea would have been a perpetual coming and going of aircraft like flies above the pool of war.

The observer, wherever on the globe his eyes were turned, would have found no area immune from the effects of the contest. Every factory in Europe and America hummed by night and day to prepare the material of strife. The economic problems of five continents had been transformed. The life of the remotest villages had suffered a strange metamorphosis. Far-away English hamlets were darkened because of air raids; little farms in Touraine, in the Scottish highlands, in the Apennines, were untilled because there were no men; Armenia had lost half her people; the folk of North Syria were dying of famine; Indian villages and African tribes had been blotted out by plague; whole countries had ceased for the moment to exist, except as geographical names. Such were but a few of the consequences of the kindling of war in a world grown too expert in destruction, a world where all nations were part one of another.

### III

War, unless it be narrowly circumscribed in area and duration, does not admit of an easy summary, and no formula can exhaust the significance of a four years' strife which engaged every major Power. But the main features are fortunately clear; the stages of the drama are patent, though the action within them may be infinitely ramified. Germany began with the immediate odds in her favour. She was superior to any combination of her enemies in the number of trained men she could put straightway into the field; she had a smooth and powerful military machine built up



patiently during a generation ; she had a centralized command, and her colleagues were subject in all matters to her will. She was aware that her opponents had greater potential strength, but it would take time for it to become actual, and she hoped to win victory long before that day dawned. Unlike her enemies, she realized the fundamental weakness of Russia, and knew that if she could deal a crushing blow in the West she might safely leave the East to be dealt with at her leisure. So, outraging all laws and conventions in her methods, she sought to win in France that "battle without a morrow" of which her General Staff had always dreamed. The dream was shattered at the Marne, but with praiseworthy courage she revised her plans. She fell back inside formidable defences, and being, as she thought, self-subsistent and wholly disciplined, set herself to wear down the spirit of her foes. For three years the war became the siege of a fortress. There were sallies by the besieged, as when Mackensen swept Russia out of Poland, when the same general overran Serbia, when Falkenhayn pushed Rumania behind the Sereth ; there were the sallies of Austria, first to the edge of the Lombard plain, and then to the Piave ; there was the great and disastrous sally of the Imperial Crown Prince at Verdun. There were attacks, too, by the besiegers : by the Russians in the East ; by the British at Gallipoli, on the borders of Palestine, and in Mesopotamia ; by Italy across the Isonzo ; by the British and French at Festubert and in Artois, at Loos and Champagne, in the long-drawn battle of the Somme, at Arras, Messines, and Ypres. These attacks gravely weakened the garrison of the fortress, and the blockade of the Allied navies lowered the resisting power of the population inside the defences. Early in the year 1917 it seemed as if the fortress might fall from an enveloping attack.

The downfall of Russia changed the prospect. Thenceforth there were no beleaguering armies in the East, and the garrison could be thinned on that side and supplies in all likelihood gathered from the huge undefended territories stretching to the Pacific. A new policy was revealed to the besieged. America had entered the war against them, but America would be slow in mustering her power, and they had the chance of annihilating the weary troops of France and Britain while they were yet unreinforced. Germany still counted upon her superior military prowess and disciplined *moral*. So far the offensive was in discredit, for the assaults of her enemies had not breached her fortifications, but she might devise a tactical method which would succeed where they

had failed. Accordingly on March 21, 1918, she gathered all her strength for a final effort, the trench campaign ceased, and the day of the open battle began.

The plan, if it were to win, must win at once. For the Allies had begun to set their house in order, they had tightened the strings of the blockade, and were concentrating authority in skilled hands. Moreover, ever nearer from the West crept the ominous cloud of America's battle-power. But the German stroke miscarried, and its failure meant the certainty of Germany's defeat. She had staked everything on the venture, and her flagging vitality could not compass a second. Further, the peril had compelled her enemies to take the final step in reform, and they had entrusted the supreme command to their greatest soldier. We have seen the masterly strategy of Foch. Waiting patiently on the appointed time, he struck a blow which put the German machine out of gear. Carrying his enemy's tactics to their logical conclusion, he kept the battle "nourished" and mobile, till on 26th September he began those hammer strokes which crumbled a great machine into débris. The victory in the field, which faint-hearts among the Allies had despaired of, came in the most shattering and cataclysmic form. At last had been fought the "battle without a morrow," for it broke not only the enemy armies but the enemy peoples, and the creed for which they had contended.

History will not deny to Germany the credit of a tremendous achievement. She alone at the start showed a proper boldness in conception, a proper vigour and tenacity in execution. She began, it is true, with certain conspicuous advantages, since her national trade had long been war, and for the first years of the campaign she was the professional arrayed against amateurs. But as the skies darkened above her, and the numbers and the armament of her enemies increased to a fatal preponderance, she rose to a greatness which had been wanting in her first magniloquent dreams. Her people suffered extreme hardships patiently, and did not break till they were assured of defeat. Her armies showed, both individually and in the mass, the utmost valour and resolution. It was no contemptible foe that yielded on 11th November. She had the elasticity of spirit to be able to revise her plans in the face of failure, and to carry out the new as methodically and vigorously as the old. She showed beyond doubt a higher average of talent in subordinate commands than any of the nations allied against her; and, when her case became desperate, she opposed a stout heart and a fertile mind to heavy odds, and proved that courage

and the power of sacrifice are not confined to the possessor of an enlightened political faith. In her stand *contra mundum* she read the world a lesson in disciplined devotion.

It is not to be assumed that the victory of the Allies was from the first assured. There were occasions, even after the Marne, when they were within easy hail of defeat. Germany had a chance to win; she failed because in certain vital matters she blundered. Her chief blunder was in her statesmanship. United herself and with complaisant colleagues, she had to face a loose alliance of proud and independent democracies. A little skill might have increased the looseness of its bonds till it dissolved, but Germany by her maladroitness welded it together. Her calculated barbarities sickened the world and turned neutrals into enemies; her clumsy propaganda weakened the impression of power which her victories had created; she lit revolutions to destroy her opponents, and scorched her hands in their flame; above all, she forced America, unwilling and unready, into the conflict. The mingled bluster and whine which had become her public voice ended by making her a laughing-stock. The policy of Germany throughout the war was of a piece with her diplomacy before 1914, an invitation to the hostility of mankind, and defensible only on the assumption that her soldiers were so great that fatuity in her statesmen did not matter.

But she failed also in the supreme military direction, for she produced no single soldier of the highest rank. Competent generals — Mackensen, Armin, Boehn, Otto von Below, Einem — she had and to spare; Hindenburg had a touch of the indefinable magnetism which makes a great popular leader; Falkenhayn had immense cleverness, and some inkling of the art as opposed to the mere science of war. But it would seem that the preoccupation of Germany with her machine and her meticulous industry made it impossible for her to produce the highest kind of military genius. Again and again throughout the campaign success was frustrated, not so much by patent errors as by narrowness of outlook and scientific woodenness of method. There were errors, too, such as the change of plan in the great advance of March 1918; but the main defect was the lack of that insight into the heart of a situation which has belonged to the foremost captains of history. Ludendorff was her ablest commander, and if organizing power, complete mastery of detail, and a sturdy resolution could of themselves make a great soldier, he would deserve to rank among the greatest. But he failed as her statesmen failed; and since the



High Command controlled the major matters of policy, on them must rest the chief blame of failure. In a war of nations strategy is concerned with more things than the movement of armies, and this blindness to other aspects than the purely military caused them to neglect the real gaps in the Allied armour. It is impossible for a candid mind, reading Ludendorff's own narrative, to doubt that he shared to the full that lack of political insight, that strange incapacity to judge the hearts of other peoples, which he attributes to his government. Therefore, with all his amazing industry and talents, he missed the chances which fortune offered. It has become the fashion in certain circles to say that the German civilians lost the war which the soldiers could have won, but there is more justice in the view that the High Command were themselves the principal architects of their country's defeat.

The Allies entered upon the struggle faced with heavy odds; their strength lay in the fact that every day that disaster was evaded the odds would lessen, till presently they would be on their side. It is for this reason that the First Marne is to be reckoned one of the decisive battles of the world; it definitely shut the door on complete defeat, and gave the defenders a breathing-space. They needed leisure to train their manhood and prepare a machine the equivalent of Germany's, and Russia's heroic battles during 1915 were therefore vital as a distraction for the enemy. Their blunders were many, but, though now it is easy to detect them, it is hard to see how at the time they could have been avoided. There was no central command, no single mind envisaging the whole world as one battle-ground, and the clumsy device of occasional conferences could not atone for the lack of executive unity. They suffered, too, from several profound misconceptions of fact. They exaggerated the strength of Russia, and did not foresee the underground forces which were destined to overthrow her. They underestimated the possibilities of their command of the sea, and were too slow to declare the blockade and, when it was declared, to make it effective. They miscalculated the strength of the German war-machine, and the power of the defensive in modern war. Their various attacks in the West during 1915 were, as is now clear, mistaken; they were not prepared either in men or material for ambitious objectives. Again, while the necessities of their position forced them to undertake divergent operations, it may fairly be argued that these operations were too divergent. They lacked purpose and a definite place in a strategical scheme; for minor

operations they were too costly, and for major operations too weak. In the long run they bore ample fruit, but only after victory was assured in the main theatre of the West. Finally, the Allies were slow to read the new lessons of war. That was inevitable, perhaps, since they were improvisers, and had to learn a new art and perfect their equipment through many experiments; and it is to their credit that in the end they read these lessons more correctly than their enemy. Their problem was the same as that of the North in the American Civil War — to stave off immediate defeat and to make actual their potential human and economic superiority. When their material strength was so organized that it surpassed that of their opponents, and when it was so used that no part of it was wasted, victory followed like the conclusion of a mathematical proof.

It would be a task both futile and invidious to discuss the relative contributions of the different Allies to this achievement. All had in it a full and noble share. France took the first shock, and to the end had the largest forces in the main theatre; she remained, as she has always been, the foremost military nation in the world; and if in the closing stages the chief effort was in other hands, that effort was guided by a French general. Russia, so long as her strength availed her, spent herself quixotically in the Allied cause. Italy fought a difficult campaign with unflinching devotion and at a terrible cost. The little nations — Belgium, Serbia, Rumania — gave their all. America, entering late into the strife, made ready great armies at a speed unparalleled in history, and brought about victory before the wreckage of the world was beyond repair. Britain's performance was in harmony with her historic tradition. Her fleet nullified the enemy on the high seas in the first months of war, and conducted the blockade which sapped his internal strength, making possible the co-operation in the field of allies separated by leagues of ocean, and the conduct of campaigns in distant battle-grounds. Her wealth bore for years the main financial burden of the Alliance, and her factories produced the greater part of that mighty reserve of material which ended by far surpassing Germany's long-prepared stores. Her armies, beginning from the smallest numbers, grew to be the equal of any in the world, alike in training, discipline, and leadership. Moreover, her steady resolution was a bulwark to all her confederates in the darkest hours. Such has always been her record in European wars. At the beginning she is underrated as a soft and pacific Power already on the decline. This in the eighteenth century was the view of the Continental

monarchs, Frederick the Great, Joseph II. of Austria, Catherine of Russia; this in 1914 was the view of the German Government. She comes slowly to a decision, enters upon war unwillingly, but wages it with all her heart and does not slacken till her purpose is attained. It was so in the days of Philip of Spain, of Louis Quatorze, and of Napoleon. The "island Poland" ends by finding the future of the world largely entrusted to her reluctant hands.

The war was one of nations rather than of governments, and without the sustained endurance of every class in the community there could have been no victory. The duty of the civilian governors was rather to direct than create, to provide channels for a popular impulse which was more potent than any endeavour of individual genius. In no campaign, it may fairly be claimed, did the soldier suffer less from political interference, and the few cases which can be cited are notable only because they stand out sharply against the background of patient and loyal co-operation. Among statesmen it cannot be said that any one figure towered above his fellows as did Lincoln's in the American Civil War. Cabinets passed through rapid changes, and a host of honest workers did their part and then made way for others, leaving their contributions to the common stock. War, indeed, calls forth a specific kind of statesmanship, a type which might well be unacceptable in normal times for the "daring pilot in extremity" may be a troublesome shipmaster in calm weather. For this reason the most conspicuous figures among the statesmen of the war were not in the main tradition of their several countries, but unorthodox types chosen for and evolved by an extreme crisis.

The struggle closed with three men directing the councils of the Allies, and standing forth as the representatives of their peoples; and in each case the leader was not wholly typical of the nation he led. M. Clemenceau had much of the essential Gallic genius, but his inspired audacity was perhaps less characteristic of the France of 1918 than was the patient caution of Pétain. Mr. Wilson guided his country without being in temperament a representative American, and Mr. Lloyd George irritated and puzzled millions who accepted his inspiration. In these three men the Allies found their ultimate leaders, who controlled the spirit as well as the form of the final stages. Two of them were in the first order as War Ministers, blending courage and tenacity with imaginative fervour and a sure instinct for essential needs. The third had no special faculty for the task, and he owed his power to the chance which made him the official head of a great people,



as a monarch must play a foremost part in his country's wars from the accident of his sitting upon the throne. The same chance made him for a season the apparent arbiter of the world's destinies, and the position placed an undue strain upon a stiff and somewhat arrogant temperament and a powerful but intolerant mind. He withdrew into an austere seclusion, refusing to share his responsibility except with lesser men, and as a consequence he was to prove impotent in the final councils of peace. Here we are not concerned with the flood of criticism which followed his fall; but as the leader of America during twenty months of campaigning, and as the prophet of certain vital truths which he alone was in the position to formulate, he has an indefeasible claim to the gratitude of mankind.

The war in the field was in the main one of the rank and file rather than of generals, and most of the battles were dependent upon the fighting vigour and endurance of the average soldier rather than upon any peculiar brilliance and subtlety in leadership. This was inevitable, partly because the struggle was so vast and intimate, reaching to the roots of human life; partly because it was full of novelties, and generals as well as privates had their business to learn. One figure alone among the commanders on any side stands out in the full heroic proportions. By whatever standard we judge him, Ferdinand Foch must take rank among the dozen greatest of the world's captains. Long before the outbreak of war he had made himself a master of his art, and a happy fate gave him the chance of putting into practice in the field the wisdom he had acquired at leisure. He had studied closely the work of Napoleon, and had brought his mind into tune with that supreme intellect so that he absorbed its methods like a collaborator rather than a pupil. Discarding the pedantic cobwebs which a too laborious German Staff had woven round the Napoleonic campaigns, he mastered those principles which to the great Emperor were like flashes of white light to illuminate his path. Few soldiers have been more learned in their profession, and few have worn their learning more lightly. His broad, sane intelligence was without prejudice or prepossession. He turned a clear eye to instant needs, and read the facts of each case with a brave candour. But he did not forget that the maxims of strategy are eternal things, and he brought his profound knowledge of the past to elucidate the present. No aspect was neglected; he knew how to inspire men by the *beau geste* as well as how to labour at the minutiae of preparation. He was both artist and man of science; he

worked at a problem by the light of reason and knowledge ; but when these failed he was content to trust that instinct which is an extra sense in great commanders. His character was a happy compound of patience and ardour ; he could follow Fabian tactics when these were called for, and he could risk everything on the sudden stroke. He was not infallible, any more than Cæsar, or Napoleon, or Lee, but he could rise from his mistakes to a higher wisdom. In a word, he had a genius for war, that rarest of human talents. In the splendid company of the historic French captains he will stand among the foremost — behind, but not far behind, the greatest of all.

He was well served by his colleagues. Joffre and Castelnau through the first difficult years laid the foundations of victory ; Pétain showed a supreme talent for defensive warfare and for the organization of armies ; army and group commanders like Mangin and Gouraud, Fayolle and Franchet d'Esperey, Plumer and Byng, were the equal of any generals of the same rank on the enemy side. But if we are to seek for the first lieutenant of the Commander-in-Chief, the choice must fall upon Haig. He more than any other man made the final conception of Foch possible. He had not the great Frenchman's gift for strategy, but he had the scarcely less valuable power of creating the weapons for the strategist to use. He was a master in the art of training troops, the greatest Britain has seen since Sir John Moore, and under his guidance the British army produced most of the main tactical developments of the campaign. He had his failures, as Foch had, but no failures or disappointments could shake his confidence in the ultimate issue. Drawing comfort from deep springs, he bore in the face of difficulties a gentle and unshakable resolution. The campaign — nay, the history of war — has produced no finer figure : great in patience, courtesy, unselfishness, serenity, and iron courage amid reverses and delays. He showed high military talent, but he showed a character which was beyond talent, and, since war in the last resort is a conflict of spirit, the finer spirit prevailed. Britain was fortunate indeed in the leader to whom she entrusted her manhood ; and of all her leaders he was the most sorely tested and abundantly proved.

“Here had been, mark, General-in-Chief,  
Thro' a whole campaign of the world's life and death,  
Doing the King's work all the dim day long.”

## IV

The short memory of mankind in seasons of peace has tended to exaggerate the beneficence of war, and to assume that a spiritual value is assured by material loss and bodily suffering. Rewards there are, but they are not certain, and the moral disorder is at least as conspicuous as the moral gain. A war does not solve absolutely any problem but the one — which side is the stronger; it may clear the ground of encumbrances and so facilitate the builders' task, but the immediate result is a desperate confusion — that deadly "disordering" which the Greek historian noted as the consequence even of victorious battles. In casting up the accounts of any armed struggle, the debit side must appear the heavier, because the losses are ascertained, while the elements of profit are too often in speculation and the far future.

Let us set down the few items where the gain to the world could not be controverted. In the first place a great arrogance, inimical to humanity, had been overthrown — an arrogance which had been shared in some degree by all nations, but of which Germany had been the extreme instance and the most truculent champion. Its devotees had appealed to force, and force had betrayed them, so that now — for a little — the temple door was closed and the god discredited. The world is at no time safe for freedom, which needs vigilant and unremitting guardianship, but the immediate menace had been destroyed. Secondly, the riddle which Lincoln propounded had been finally answered, and the democratic nations had shown themselves as able as any autocracy to submit with a whole heart to discipline. It may be read in Tacitus how into the sombre grove of the High God of the Germans none might enter save with a chain round his neck to show his subjection to the divinity. Let the old legend stand as a parable. These gods were tyrants, and their mandate was to enslave. Their votaries, whether they spoke the rhetoric of a mad racialism or the chatter of a bastard science, were serfs themselves and would reduce mankind to their own ignominy, though they called it by noble names. They had challenged the world, as Attila and Timour had challenged it, and the free men had proved themselves stronger than the slaves. Again, the ground had been cleared for a better ordering of the world, much of the débris of past ages was now estimated at its true worthlessness, ancient inequitable frontiers could be adjusted, old wrongs could be righted. Again, the magnitude and the horrors of the contest had gone far to sicken



mankind of strife and predispose them to find a more rational way of settling differences. Already the conception of a true internationalism was dawning which should add to the patriotism of races and nations a patriotism of humanity. Lastly, the world had been shaken out of its complacency, and, if not to governments, to hosts of humble folk there had come that self-knowledge which is the beginning of wisdom.

These were gains of incalculable worth, but no one of them had been finally won when the guns fell silent, and to each was attached an intricacy of further problems which, unless solved, would nullify the advantage. The political task in itself might well seem too great for human wisdom, for, if many ramshackle structures had been demolished, the ground was heavily cumbered with the rubble, and there were sharp differences of view as to the edifice to be built. When after Waterloo the soldiers laid down their task, the civilian statesmen who took it up had before them a comparatively simple problem. They were still dealing with the world in the form in which it had been handed down from the Middle Ages — with tangible things like dynasties and frontiers; not with a world closely linked in its every interest and with the *imponderabilia* of democracy. The Congress of Vienna was child's play to the coming conferences of the Allies. They had Germany for their first problem, and there it was not a mere question of the rectification of frontiers, but of direct and indirect assistance in building up a people politically and economically broken. Had that task stood alone it would have been sufficiently great, but it was only one of many; for the war had altered the constituents of all the world. Next in magnitude came the problem of Russia, where the social dissolution was now complete, and Bolshevism was spreading like a rank fungus in its unwholesome gloom. There was the intricate business of the Baltic provinces and of Poland, which must be reconstituted as a Power in spite of the difficulties which had made her for two centuries the despair of European statesmen. There was the matter of Austria, now dissolved into her original racial elements. Last, in Europe, there was the eternal problem of the Balkans, where races were inextricably mixed, and of European Turkey, which must now pass in the main from Ottoman hands. In Africa were the German colonies, which could not be restored to their former owners, and for which a new régime must be devised under the trusteeship of the Allies. In Asia there were other German colonies, and the débris of the Turkish Empire, which must find new guardians. No one of these matters was simple,

and all were clogged with old historical rivalries among the Allies themselves. Moreover, there was one gratuitous complication. The war had been fought largely for the cause of nationality; but nationality is not a term of art, and its interpretation is never easy. Pressed too far, it might mean the splitting up of historic states into atoms, for which in the modern world there could be no hopeful future. The phrase "self-determination," so recklessly flung about the world, was to sow tares in many a well-tilled field.

Nor did territorial adjustments exhaust the problem. There was the complex business of the details of Germany's reparation, of fixing indemnities and devising a means of exacting them from a bankrupt country—a matter on which wide differences of opinion might appear among the Allies. Moreover, there was the whole question of the future economy of an exhausted world. Unless this war differed from all others, peace would be followed by dire poverty, world-wide unemployment, starvation over great areas, popular unrest which might rend the worn fabric of civilization. The conquerors of Germany had to settle not only the fate of the conquered but their own.

The urgent practical tasks were immense enough in themselves, and they were made infinitely more arduous by the debauch of theorizing which peace inaugurated throughout the globe. A facile dialectic went abroad to loosen convictions, wisdom was pushed to the point where it became error, nonsense was ingeniously elaborated till it seemed self-evident truth. On one side the principle of nationality was exaggerated into a foolish particularism; and there was a tendency to seek assurances and safeguards which would perpetuate the old hostilities. On the other side, the belief in the State, which Germany had made an idolatry, tended by an inevitable reaction to become dangerously shaken. The rigid discipline of the war had satiated all the peoples with government, and everywhere there was an impulse to anarchy. The extremists who taught that political institutions were redundant or vicious, and that society must be brigaded in economic classes, now found a readier hearing. Moreover, a despotism which has been overthrown is apt to be replaced by a counter-despotism, and immature and feverish minds saw in the monstrous innovation of Russia an example to be admired. Even among the Western nations the great principles of democracy were a little weakened, and men were inclined to question the most fundamental articles of their political faith. The world had become one vast laboratory,

where ignorance clamoured for blind experiments with unknown chemicals.

Those who believed that victory would mean a fresh start with high hearts and girded loins and clear eyes in a new world were strangely forgetful of the lessons of history. For war clogs the brain and weakens the nerve, and the heavy burden of settlement falls upon shoulders already wearied and bowed. The task had to be undertaken by statesmen all of whom were tired, and many of whom were unfitted for the work, since the qualities which made them eminent in war were often a handicap in the very different duties of peace. As with the leaders, so with the peoples. Little assistance could be got from the rank and file, who were as bewildered as their masters. When Michelet after the writing of his history fell ill and sought leisure, he excused himself on the plea, "J'ai abattu tant de rois." Like the historian, the world desired above all things rest and ease, dazed with the long effort and the clattering about its ears of so many landmarks. Men's minds were relaxed and surfeited, when they were not disillusioned. After the strain of the distant vision they were apt to seek the immediate advantage; after so much altruism they asked leave to attend to private interests; after their unremitting labours they claimed the right of apathy. In short, problems of a magnitude unknown in history had to be faced by jaded statesmen and listless confused peoples. There was yet another bequest of war, its natural offspring —

"Discordia demens,  
Vipereum crinem vittis innexa cruentis."

A lurking madness was abroad in the world. Human life had been shorn of its sacredness, death and misery and torture had become too familiar, the old decorums and sanctions had lost something of their power. The passions of many millions cannot be stirred for four years without leaving a hideous legacy. Men were moved by waves of sheer dementia, relapsing into wolfishness and childishness, and a few score human lives seemed a trivial price to pay for the attainment of some pedantry. Smug revolutionaries would condemn thousands of their fellows to death for a whim, and neither they nor the world at large seemed to realize the enormity of the crime. The crust which we call civilization had worn thin, and beneath could be heard the muttering of the primordial fires.

Therefore those who looked forward to peace with happy dreams were fated to be disillusioned. It was very certain that high hopes



would be dashed, and that generous souls would cry out in bitterness that the battles had been fought in vain, and that what began as a crusade had ended in a cynical huckstering. But this pessimism was as unreasonable as the earlier illusions and as blind to the teaching of the past. Peace does not follow naturally upon victory. It is itself a construction, a slow and difficult effort to bridge the chasm between two worlds, and it is inevitably a time of discouragement. It is like a season of thaw. The frosts of January are cruel things, but for the strong they tauten the sinews and stir the blood, whereas in a thaw there is nothing but grey skies and muddy roads and plashing fields. Yet that is the course of nature, and summer cannot follow winter without the depressing stage of early spring. If the winter wheat has been truly sown, there will come in due season the time of harvest.

The gains and losses are not yet to be assessed, but there is ground for humble confidence that that sowing in unimaginable sacrifice and pain will yet quicken and bear fruit to the bettering of the world. The war was a vindication of the essential greatness of our common nature, for victory was won less by genius in the few than by faithfulness in the many. Every class had its share, and the plain man, born in these latter days of doubt and divided purpose, marched to heights of the heroic unsurpassed in simpler ages. In this revelation democracy found its final justification, and civilization its truest hope. Mankind may console itself in its hour of depression and failure, and steel itself to new labours with the knowledge that once it has been great.

The sacrifice was chiefly of innocence and youth, and in computing it there can be no distinction between friend and enemy. *Hanc ex diverso sedem veniemus in unam.* That Country of the Young knows no frontiers of race or creed. Most men who fell died for honourable things, and perversities of national policy were changed into the eternal sanctities — love of country and home, comradeship, loyalty to manly virtues, the indomitable questing of youth. Innocence does not perish in vain, against such a spirit the gates of death cannot prevail, and the endurance of their work is more certain than the coming of spring. The world is poor indeed without them, for they were the flower of their race, the straightest of limb, the keenest of brain, the most eager of spirit. In such a mourning each man thinks first of his friends; for each of us has seen his crowded circle become like the stalls at an unpopular play; each has suddenly found the world of time strangely empty and eternity strangely thronged. Yet to look back upon

the gallant procession of those who offered their all and had the gift accepted, is to know exultation as well as sorrow. The youth which died almost before it had gazed on the world, the poets with their songs unsung, the makers and the doers who left their tasks unfinished, found immortal achievement in their death. Their memory will abide so long as men are found to set honour before ease, and a nation lives not for its ledgers alone but for some purpose of virtue. They have become, in the fancy of Henry Vaughan, the shining spires of that City to which we travel.

THE END

## APPENDIX





## APPENDIX

### I

#### TERMS OF ARMISTICE WITH BULGARIA

(Signed on September 29, 1918.)

I. — Immediate evacuation of the territories still occupied in Greece and Serbia in conformity with an arrangement to be concluded. No cattle, grain, or stores of any kind are to be removed from these territories. No destruction shall be caused by the Bulgarian troops on their departure. The Bulgarian Administration shall continue to carry on its functions in the parts of Bulgaria at present occupied by the Allies.

II. — Immediate demobilization of all the Bulgarian armies, with the exception that a group of all arms, comprising 3 divisions of 16 battalions each and 4 regiments of cavalry, shall be maintained on a war-footing, of which 2 divisions shall be allocated to the defence of the Eastern frontier of Bulgaria and of the Dobrudja, and the 148th Division to the protection of the railways.

III. — The arms, ammunition, and military transport belonging to the demobilized units shall be deposited at points to be indicated by the Supreme Command of the "Armées d'Orient." They will then be stored by the Bulgarian authorities, and under the control of the Allies.

The horses will likewise be handed over to the Allies.

IV. — The material belonging to the IVth Greek Army Corps, which was taken from the Greek army at the time of the occupation of Eastern Macedonia, shall be handed over to Greece, in so far as it has not been sent to Germany.

V. — Those portions of the Bulgarian troops at the present time west of the meridian of Uskub, and belonging to the XIth German Army, shall lay down their arms and shall be considered until further notice to be prisoners of war. The officers will retain their arms.

VI. — Bulgarian prisoners of war in the East shall be employed by the Allied armies until the conclusion of peace, without reciprocity as regards Allied prisoners of war in Bulgarian hands. These latter shall

be handed over without delay to the Allied authorities, and deported civilians shall be entirely free to return to their homes.

VII. — Germany and Austria-Hungary shall have a period of four weeks to withdraw their troops and military organizations. The diplomatic and consular representatives of the Central Powers, as well as their nationals, must leave Bulgarian territory within the same period. The orders for the cessation of hostilities will be given by the signatories of the present convention.

## II

### TERMS OF ARMISTICE WITH TURKEY

(Signed on October 30, 1918.)

I. — The opening of the Dardanelles and the Bosphorus, and secure access to the Black Sea. Allied occupation of the Dardanelles and the Bosphorus forts.

II. — The positions of all minefields, torpedo-tubes, and other obstructions in Turkish waters to be indicated, and assistance to be given to sweep or remove them as may be required.

III. — All available information as to mines in the Black Sea to be communicated.

IV. — All Allied prisoners of war and Armenian interned persons and prisoners to be collected in Constantinople and handed over unconditionally to the Allies.

V. — The immediate demobilization of the Turkish army, except for such troops as are required for the surveillance of the frontiers and for the maintenance of internal order. The number of effectives and their disposition to be determined later by the Allies after consultation with the Turkish Government.

VI. — The surrender of all war vessels in Turkish waters or in waters occupied by Turkey; these ships to be interned at such Turkish port or ports as may be directed, except such small vessels as are required for police or similar purposes in Turkish territorial waters.

VII. — The Allies to have the right to occupy any strategic points in the event of any situation arising which threatens the security of the Allies.

VIII. — Free use by Allied ships of all ports and anchorages now in Turkish occupation and the denial of their use to the enemy. Similar conditions to apply to Turkish mercantile shipping in Turkish waters for purposes of trade and the demobilization of the army.

IX. — Use of all ship-repair facilities at all Turkish ports and arsenals.

X. — Allied occupation of the Taurus tunnel system.

XI. — The immediate withdrawal of the Turkish troops from North-West Persia to behind the pre-war frontier has already been ordered and will be carried out. Part of Trans-Caucasia has already been



ordered to be evacuated by Turkish troops; the remainder is to be evacuated if required by the Allies after they have studied the situation there.

XII. — Wireless, telegraph, and cable stations to be controlled by the Allies, Turkish Government messages excepted.

XIII. — Prohibition to destroy any naval, military, or commercial material.

XIV. — Facilities to be given for the purchase of coal, oil-fuel, and naval material from Turkish sources, after the requirements of the country have been met. None of the above material to be exported.

XV. — Allied Control Officers to be placed on all railways, including such portions of the Trans-Caucasian Railways as are now under Turkish control, which must be placed at the free and complete disposal of the Allied authorities, due consideration being given to the needs of the population. This clause is to include Allied occupation of Batoum. Turkey will raise no objection to the occupation of Baku by the Allies.

XVI. — The surrender of all garrisons in the Hedjaz, Assir, Yemen, Syria, and Mesopotamia to the nearest Allied Commander; and the withdrawal of troops from Cilicia, except those necessary to maintain order, as will be determined under Clause V.

XVII. — The surrender of all Turkish officers in Tripolitania and Cyrenaica to the nearest Italian garrison. Turkey guarantees to stop supplies and communication with these officers if they do not obey the order to surrender.

XVIII. — The surrender of all ports occupied in Tripolitania and Cyrenaica, including Misurata, to the nearest Allied garrison.

XIX. — All Germans and Austrians, naval, military, and civilian, to be evacuated within one month from the Turkish dominions: those in remote districts to be evacuated as soon after as may be possible.

XX. — The compliance with such orders as may be conveyed for the disposal of the equipment, arms, and ammunition, including transport, of that portion of the Turkish army which is demobilized under Clause V.

XXI. — An Allied representative to be attached to the Turkish Ministry of Supplies in order to safeguard Allied interests. This representative is to be furnished with all that may be necessary for this purpose.

XXII. — Turkish prisoners to be kept at the disposal of the Allied Powers. The release of Turkish civilian prisoners over military age to be considered.

XXIII. — Obligation on the part of Turkey to cease all relations with the Central Powers.

XXIV. — In case of disorder in the six Armenian vilayets, the Allies reserve to themselves the right to occupy any part of them.

XXV. — Hostilities between the Allies and Turkey shall cease from noon, local time, on Thursday, the 31st October, 1918.

## III

## TERMS OF ARMISTICE WITH AUSTRIA-HUNGARY

(Signed on November 3, 1918.)

## A. — MILITARY CLAUSES

I. — The immediate cessation of hostilities by land, sea, and air.

II. — Total demobilization of the Austro-Hungarian Army, and immediate withdrawal of all Austro-Hungarian forces operating on the front from the North Sea to Switzerland.

Within Austro-Hungarian territory, limited as in Clause III. below, there shall only be maintained as an organized military force a maximum of 20 divisions, reduced to pre-war peace effectives.

Half the Divisional, Corps, and Army artillery and equipment shall be collected at points to be indicated by the Allies and United States of America for delivery to them, beginning with all such material as exists in the territories to be evacuated by the Austro-Hungarian forces.

III. — Evacuation of all territories invaded by Austria-Hungary since the beginning of war. Withdrawal within such periods as shall be determined by the Commander-in-Chief of the Allied forces on each front of the Austro-Hungarian Armies, behind a line fixed as follows: —

From Piz Umbrail to the north of the Stelvio it will follow the crest of the Rhætian Alps up to the sources of the Adige and the Eisach, passing thence by Mounts Reschen and Brenner and the heights of Oetz and Ziller; the line thence turns south, crossing Mount Toblach, and meeting the present frontier of the Carnic Alps. It follows this frontier up to Mount Tarvis, and after Mount Tarvis the watershed of the Julian Alps by the Col of Predil, Mount Mangart, the Tricorno (Terglou), and the watershed of the Cols di Podberdo, Podlaniscam, and Idria. From this point the line turns south-east towards the Schneeberg, excluding the whole basin of the Save and its tributaries; from the Schneeberg it goes down towards the coast in such a way as to include Castua, Mattuglia, and Volosca in the evacuated territories.

It will also follow the administrative limits of the present province of Dalmatia, including to the north Licarica and Trivania, and to the south territory limited by a line from the shore of Cape Planca to the summits of the watershed eastwards, so as to include in the evacuated area all the valleys and watercourses flowing towards Sebenico, such as the Cicola, Kerka, Butisnica, and their tributaries. It will also include all the islands in the north and west of Dalmatia, from Premuda, Selve, Ulbo, Scherda, Maon, Pago, and Puntadura in the north up to Meleda in the south, embracing Sant' Andrea, Busi, Lissa, Lesina, Tercola, Curzola, Cazza, and Lagosta, as well as the neighbouring

rocks and islets and Pelagosa, only excepting the islands of Great and Small Zirona, Bua, Solta, and Brazza.

All territories thus evacuated will be occupied by the troops of the Allies and of the United States of America.

All military and railway equipment of all kinds (including coal), belonging to or within these territories, to be left *in situ*, and surrendered to the Allies according to special orders given by the Commanders-in-Chief of the forces of the Associated Powers on the different fronts. No new destruction, pillage, or requisition to be done by enemy troops in the territories to be evacuated by them and occupied by the forces of the Associated Powers.

IV. — The Allies shall have the right of free movement over all road and rail and water ways in Austro-Hungarian territory and of the use of the necessary Austrian and Hungarian means of transportation.

The Armies of the Associated Powers shall occupy such strategic points in Austria-Hungary at such times as they may deem necessary to enable them to conduct military operations or to maintain order.

They shall have the right of requisition on payment for the troops of the Associated Powers wherever they may be.

V. — Complete evacuation of all German troops within fifteen days, not only from the Italian and Balkan fronts, but from all Austro-Hungarian territory.

Internment of all German troops which have not left Austria-Hungary within that date.

VI. — The administration of the evacuated territories of Austria-Hungary will be entrusted to the local authorities under the control of the Allied and Associated Armies of Occupation.

VII. — The immediate repatriation without reciprocity of all Allied prisoners of war and interned subjects, and of civil populations evacuated from their homes, on conditions to be laid down by the Commanders-in-Chief of the forces of the Associated Powers on the various fronts.

VIII. — Sick and wounded who cannot be removed from evacuated territory will be cared for by Austro-Hungarian *personnel*, who will be left on the spot with the medical material required.

#### B. — NAVAL CONDITIONS

I. — Immediate cessation of all hostilities at sea, and definite information to be given as to the location and movements of all Austro-Hungarian ships.

Notification to be made to neutrals that freedom of navigation in all territorial waters is given to the naval and mercantile marines of the Allied and Associated Powers, all questions of neutrality being waived.

II. — Surrender to the Allies and United States of America of 15 Austro-Hungarian submarines, completed between the years 1910 and



1918, and of all German submarines which are in or may hereafter enter Austro-Hungarian territorial waters. All other Austro-Hungarian submarines to be paid off and completely disarmed, and to remain under the supervision of the Allies and United States of America.

III. — Surrender to the Allies and United States of America, with their complete armament and equipment, of: —

- 3 battleships,
- 3 light cruisers,
- 9 destroyers,
- 12 torpedo-boats,
- 1 minelayer,
- 6 Danube monitors,

to be designated by the Allies and the United States of America. All other surface warships (including river craft) are to be concentrated in Austro-Hungarian naval bases to be designated by the Allies and the United States of America, and are to be paid off and completely disarmed and placed under the supervision of the Allies and United States of America.

IV. — Freedom of navigation to all warships and merchant ships of the Allied and Associated Powers to be given in the Adriatic and up the River Danube and its tributaries in the territorial waters and territory of Austria-Hungary.

The Allies and Associated Powers shall have the right to sweep up all minefields and obstructions, and the positions of these are to be indicated.

In order to ensure the freedom of navigation on the Danube, the Allies and the United States of America shall be empowered to occupy or to dismantle all fortifications or defence works.

V. — The existing blockade conditions set up by the Allied and Associated Powers are to remain unchanged, and all Austro-Hungarian merchant ships found at sea are to remain liable to capture, save exceptions which may be made by a Commission nominated by the Allies and United States of America.

VI. — All naval aircraft are to be concentrated and immobilized in Austro-Hungarian bases to be designated by the Allies and United States of America.

VII. — Evacuation of all the Italian coasts and of all ports occupied by Austria-Hungary outside their national territory, and the abandonment of all floating craft, naval materials, equipment, and materials for inland navigation of all kinds.

VIII. — Occupation by the Allies and the United States of America of the land and sea fortifications and the islands which form the defences and of the dockyards and arsenal at Pola.

IX. — All merchant vessels held by Austria-Hungary belonging to the Allies and Associated Powers to be returned.

X. — No destruction of ships or of materials to be permitted before evacuation, surrender, or restoration.

XI. — All naval and mercantile marine prisoners of war of the Allied and Associated Powers in Austro-Hungarian hands to be returned without reciprocity.

## IV

## TERMS OF ARMISTICE WITH GERMANY

(Signed at 5 a.m. on November 11, 1918.)

## A. — CLAUSES RELATING TO WESTERN FRONT

I. — Cessation of operations by land and in the air six hours after the signature of the Armistice [viz., at 11 a.m.].

II. — Immediate evacuation of invaded countries — Belgium, France, Alsace-Lorraine, Luxemburg — so ordered as to be completed within fourteen days from the signature of the Armistice.

German troops which have not left the above-mentioned territories within the period fixed will become prisoners of war.

Occupation by the Allied and United States Forces jointly will keep pace with evacuation in these areas.

All movements of evacuation and occupation will be regulated in accordance with the annexed Note.

III. — Repatriation, beginning at once, to be completed within fourteen days, of all inhabitants of the countries above enumerated (including hostages, persons under trial, or convicted).

IV. — Surrender in good condition by the German Armies of the following equipment: —

5,000 guns (2,500 heavy, 2,500 field).

30,000 machine guns.

3,000 *Minenwerfer*.

2,000 aeroplanes (fighters, bombers — firstly D 7's — and night bombing machines).

The above to be delivered *in situ* to the Allied and United States troops in accordance with the detailed conditions laid down in the annexed Note.

V. — Evacuation by the German Armies of the countries on the left bank of the Rhine. These countries on the left bank of the Rhine shall be administered by the local authorities under the control of the Allied and United States Armies of occupation.

The occupation of these territories will be carried out by Allied and United States garrisons holding the principal crossings of the Rhine (Mayence, Coblenz, Cologne), together with bridgeheads at these points of a 30 kilometre [about 19 miles] radius on the right bank, and by garrisons similarly holding the strategic points of the regions.

A neutral zone shall be set up on the right bank of the Rhine between the river and a line drawn 10 kilometres [ $6\frac{1}{4}$  miles] distant, starting from the Dutch frontier to the Swiss frontier. In the case of inhabitants, no person shall be prosecuted for having taken part in any military measures previous to the signing of the Armistice.

No measure of a general or official character shall be taken which would have, as a consequence, the depreciation of industrial establishments or a reduction of their *personnel*.

Evacuation by the enemy of the Rhinelands shall be so ordered as to be completed within a further period of sixteen days—in all thirty-one days after the signature of the Armistice.

All movements of evacuation and occupation will be regulated according to the annexed Note.

VI.—In all territory evacuated by the enemy there shall be no evacuation of inhabitants; no damage or harm shall be done to the persons or property of the inhabitants.

No destruction of any kind to be committed.

Military establishments of all kinds shall be delivered intact, as well as military stores of food, munitions, equipment not removed during the periods fixed for evacuation.

Stores of food of all kinds for the civil population, cattle, etc., shall be left *in situ*.

Industrial establishments shall not be impaired in any way, and their *personnel* shall not be moved.

VII.—Roads and means of communication of every kind, railroads, waterways, main roads, bridges, telegraphs, telephones, shall be in no manner impaired.

All civil and military *personnel* at present employed on them shall remain.

5,000 locomotives, 150,000 wagons, and 5,000 motor lorries in good working order, with all necessary spare parts and fittings, shall be delivered to the Associated Powers within the period fixed for the evacuation of Belgium and Luxemburg.

The railways of Alsace-Lorraine shall be handed over within the same period, together with all pre-war *personnel* and material.

Further, material necessary for the working of railways in the country on the left bank of the Rhine shall be left *in situ*.

All stores of coal and material for upkeep of permanent way, signals, and repair shops shall be left *in situ* and kept in an efficient state by Germany, as far as the means of communication are concerned, during the whole period of the Armistice.

All barges taken from the Allies shall be restored to them. The annexed Note regulates the detail of these measures.

VIII.—The German Command shall be responsible for revealing all mines or delay-action fuses disposed on territory evacuated by the German troops, and shall assist in their discovery and destruction.

The German Command shall also reveal all destructive measures that may have been taken (such as poisoning or pollution of springs, wells, etc.), under penalty of reprisals.

IX.—The right of requisition shall be exercised by the Allied and United States Armies in all occupied territory, save for settlement of accounts with authorized persons.



The upkeep of the troops of occupation in the Rhineland (excluding Alsace-Lorraine) shall be charged to the German Government.

X. — The immediate repatriation, without reciprocity, according to detailed conditions which shall be fixed, of all Allied and United States prisoners of war; the Allied Powers and the United States of America shall be able to dispose of these prisoners as they wish. However, the return of German prisoners of war interned in Holland and Switzerland shall continue as heretofore. The return of German prisoners of war shall be settled at peace preliminaries.

XI. — Sick and wounded who cannot be removed from evacuated territory will be cared for by German *personnel*, who will be left on the spot, with the medical material required.

#### B. — CLAUSES RELATING TO THE EASTERN FRONTIERS OF GERMANY

XII. — All German troops at present in any territory which before the war belonged to Russia, Rumania, or Turkey, shall withdraw within the frontiers of Germany as they existed on August 1, 1914; and all German troops at present in territories which before the war formed part of Russia must likewise return to within the frontiers of Germany as above defined as soon as the Allies shall think the moment suitable, having regard to the internal situation of these territories.

XIII. — Evacuation by German troops to begin at once; and all German instructors, prisoners, and civilian as well as military agents now on the territory of Russia (as defined on August 1, 1914) to be recalled.

XIV. — German troops to cease at once all requisitions and seizures, and any other undertaking with a view to obtaining supplies intended for Germany in Rumania and Russia, as defined on August 1, 1914.

XV. — Abandonment of the Treaties of Bukarest and Brest-Litovsk and of the Supplementary Treaties.

XVI. — The Allies shall have free access to the territories evacuated by the Germans on their Eastern frontier, either through Danzig or by the Vistula, in order to convey supplies to the populations of these territories or for the purpose of maintaining order.

#### C. — CLAUSE RELATING TO EAST AFRICA

XVII. — Unconditional evacuation of all German forces operating in East Africa within one month.

#### D. — GENERAL CLAUSES

XVIII. — Repatriation, without reciprocity, within a maximum period of one month, in accordance with detailed conditions hereafter to be fixed, of all civilians interned or deported who may be citizens of other Allied or Associated States than those mentioned in Clause III.

XIX. — With the reservation that any future claims and demands of the Allies and United States of America remain unaffected, the following financial conditions are required : —

Reparation for damage done.

While the Armistice lasts no public securities shall be removed by the enemy which can serve as a pledge to the Allies for the recovery or reparation for war losses.

Immediate restitution of the cash deposit in the National Bank of Belgium, and, in general, immediate return of all documents, specie, stocks, shares, paper money, together with plant for the issue thereof, touching public or private interests in the invaded countries.

Restitution of the Russian and Rumanian gold yielded to Germany or taken by that Power.

This gold to be delivered in trust to the Allies until the signature of peace.

#### E. — NAVAL CONDITIONS

XX. — Immediate cessation of all hostilities at sea, and definite information to be given as to the location and movements of all German ships.

Notification to be given to neutrals that freedom of navigation in all territorial waters is given to the Naval and Mercantile Marines of the Allied and Associated Powers, all questions of neutrality being waived.

XXI. — All Naval and Mercantile Marine prisoners of war of the Allied and Associated Powers in German hands to be returned, without reciprocity.

XXII. — Handing over to the Allies and the United States of all submarines (including all submarine cruisers and minelayers) which are present at the moment with full complement in the ports specified by the Allies and the United States. Those that cannot put to sea to be deprived of crews and supplies, and shall remain under the supervision of the Allies and the United States. Submarines ready to put to sea shall be prepared to leave German ports immediately on receipt of wireless order to sail to the port of surrender, the remainder to follow as early as possible. The conditions of this Article shall be carried [out] within fourteen days after the signing of the Armistice.

XXIII. — The following German surface warships, which shall be designated by the Allies and the United States of America, shall forthwith be disarmed and thereafter interned in neutral ports, or, failing them, Allied ports, to be designated by the Allies and the United States of America, and placed under the surveillance of the Allies and the United States of America, only caretakers being left on board, namely : —

6 battle cruisers.

10 battleships.

8 light cruisers, including two minelayers.

50 destroyers of the most modern types.

All other surface warships (including river craft) are to be concentrated in German naval bases to be designated by the Allies and the United States of America, and are to be paid off and completely disarmed and placed under the supervision of the Allies and the United States of America. All vessels of the auxiliary fleet (trawlers, motor-vessels, etc.) are to be disarmed. All vessels specified for internment shall be ready to leave German ports seven days after the signing of the Armistice. Directions of the voyage will be given by wireless.

NOTE. — A declaration has been signed by the Allied Delegates and handed to the German Delegates, to the effect that, in the event of ships not being handed over owing to the mutinous state of the Fleet, the Allies reserve the right to occupy Heligoland as an advanced base to enable them to enforce the terms of the Armistice. The German Delegates have on their part signed a Declaration that they will recommend the Chancellor to accept this.

XXIV. — The Allies and the United States of America shall have the right to sweep up all minefields and obstructions laid by Germany outside German territorial waters, and the positions of these are to be indicated.

XXV. — Freedom of access to and from the Baltic to be given to the Naval and Mercantile Marines of the Allied and Associated Powers. To secure this, the Allies and the United States of America shall be empowered to occupy all German forts, fortifications, batteries, and defence works of all kinds in all the entrances from the Kattegat into the Baltic, and to sweep up all mines and obstructions within and without German territorial waters without any questions of neutrality being raised, and the positions of all such mines and obstructions are to be indicated.

XXVI. — The existing blockade conditions set up by the Allied and Associated Powers are to remain unchanged, and all German merchant ships found at sea are to remain liable to capture. The Allies and United States contemplate the provisioning of Germany during the Armistice as shall be found necessary.

XXVII. — All Naval aircraft are to be concentrated and immobilized in German bases to be specified by the Allies and the United States of America.

XXVIII. — In evacuating the Belgian coasts and forts Germany shall abandon all merchant ships, tugs, lighters, cranes, and all other harbour materials, all materials for inland navigation, all aircraft and air materials and stores, all arms and armaments, and all stores and apparatus of all kinds.

XXIX. — All Black Sea ports are to be evacuated by Germany; all Russian warships of all descriptions seized by Germany in the Black Sea are to be handed over to the Allies and the United States of America; all neutral merchant ships seized are to be released; all warlike and other materials of all kinds seized in those ports are to be



returned, and German materials as specified in Clause XXVIII. are to be abandoned.

XXX. — All merchant ships in German hands belonging to the Allied and Associated Powers are to be restored in ports to be specified by the Allies and the United States of America without reciprocity.

XXXI. — No destruction of ships or of materials to be permitted before evacuation, surrender, or restoration.

XXXII. — The German Government shall formally notify the neutral Governments of the world, and particularly the Governments of Norway, Sweden, Denmark, and Holland, that all restrictions placed on the trading of their vessels with the Allied and Associated countries, whether by the German Government or by private German interest, and whether in return for specific concessions, such as the export of shipbuilding materials, or not, are immediately cancelled.

XXXIII. — No transfers of German merchant shipping of any description to any neutral flag are to take place after signature of the Armistice.

#### F. — DURATION OF ARMISTICE

XXXIV. — The duration of the Armistice is to be thirty-six days, with option to extend. During this period, on failure of execution of any of the above clauses, the Armistice may be denounced by one of the contracting parties on forty-eight hours' previous notice.

#### G. — TIME LIMIT FOR REPLY

XXXV. — This Armistice to be accepted or refused by Germany within seventy-two hours of notification.

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